

James Luchte

# Early Greek Thought

Before the Dawn

Continuum Studies in Ancient Philosophy



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## **Continuum Studies in Ancient Philosophy**

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*For my Students*



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## Prologue: Before the Dawn

*We must call into question* a longstanding mythology, and its ceaseless repetition, that is tragically alive in both the Analytic and Continental traditions – that the ‘Pre-Socratics had the grandiose audacity to break with all traditional forms of knowledge’ (Alain Badiou, in his essay, ‘Lacan and the Pre-Socratics’<sup>1</sup>, on Jacques Lacan, and *himself* – and, a *plethora* of the same). We must also seek to call into question the contention that poetics is *inferior* to mathematics, and thus, to ‘science’. We must attempt to think differently, amid a responsive engagement with early Greek thought, so as to retrieve the originary impetus for philosophical thought.

Each of the repetitive variants of this *unacknowledged mythology* must be dismantled in an attempt to not only retrieve an ‘indigenous’ interpretation of archaic Greek thought – but also, to expose the deceptively *mythological* character of contemporary meta-narratives of the ‘origins’ of ‘Western’, ‘Occidental’ philosophy. *Early Greek Thought: Before the Dawn* will set forth an interpretation of the major *Hesperian* thinkers, before Socrates and Plato – the so-called, ‘pre-socratics’ or ‘pre-platonic’ *philosophers*. Practicing a hermeneutical *methodos* and style, inspired by early German Romanticism, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, we will excavate the *context of emergence* of early tragic thought through a genealogical exploration of the mytho-poetic horizons of the archaic world, in relation to which, as Plato testifies, the ‘Greeks’ were merely ‘children’. This approach will be contrasted with those who have, in both the analytic and continental ‘traditions’, merely repeated *anachronistic* ideologies of so-called ‘pre-socratic philosophy’, either from the valuations of Plato, Aristotle, and their progeny, or the Modernist reductions to a materialist physics, or, contemporary *scientism* and *mathematicism*.

We will seek to disclose ‘philosophy in the tragic age’, as a creative ‘affirmation’ of a ‘contestations’ of mytho-poetic narratives and ‘ways of being’. Not only will our ‘meditation’ draw upon the ‘exceptions’ – the *usual suspects* – of the Continental tradition, such as the early German Romantics, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Georges Bataille, Jan Patôcka, David Krell and the post-structuralists, but will also explicitly engage the prevailing

*scientistic* and ‘philological’ *mummifications*<sup>2</sup> of tragic thought that have remained hegemonic, since the ‘falsifications’ of Plato. Our emphasis will be upon a cultivation of a nuanced understanding of the fragments of the archaic thinkers from within these contexts of their emergence, not only singly, but gathered as expressions of an extant life-world and its linguistic-cultural tradition – expressions uttered amid an *opening* conversation amongst thinkers. We will invite each tragic thinker to this conversation (*game*) to this unique *topos* (place) for each of their perspectives, a perhaps ‘novel’ emergence amid the *epochal discordance*<sup>3</sup> of archaic mytho-poetic horizons. In this way, we will articulate an interpretive engagement with the tragic thinkers which will, due to its orientation (contexts of emergence, narrative, poetic topology), facilitate the possibility of a fertile encounter with the thought of archaic Greece that is not merely a ‘function’ of repetitive anachronism, nor a mere ornament to our own (discordant) philosophical ‘conversation’ in the contemporary world. In this way, it is the intention of this work to cast new light upon the significance of early Greek thought not only as ‘history of philosophy’, but also, for our own *insurmountable* tragic truth.

The mediations are ‘divided’ into two parts, one which concerns itself with the method of interpretation, in light of an attempt to retrieve an indigenous understanding of early Greek thought. The second part invites the early ‘Greek’ thinkers to a ‘conversation’, in which each will participate in a disclosure of the tragic thinkers amid their context of emergence.

We will begin with a meditation upon the ubiquitous *motif of the dawn* – upon its near *mystical* ambiguity, irony and wit, in the assertion that the ‘Greeks’ enacted the ‘beginning’ of an Occidental *ethos* that *essentially* and *historically* surpasses the ‘East’, and its mytho-poetic topographies. With this meditation upon the impossibility of a *pure* ‘beginning’, we will turn to the mytho-poetic lifeworld of the tragic thinkers, so as to understand the *topos* of departure – though not *beginning* – of archaic thought. Specifically, we will set forth a ‘rough sketch’ of the hermeneutic *context of emergence* for tragic thought by tracing its sources to the agonistic contest of archetypal poetic figures, and horizons, of mythological poetry from the fertility of Homer, Hesiod, Archilochus, Sappho, Orpheus, and myriad other ‘voices’.

From amid this ‘chaos’ of perspectives, we will begin an exploration of the question of method with respect to the various possibilities for an interpretation of early Greek tragic thought, turning first to Nietzsche, with his *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and *The Birth of Tragedy*, which, it may be argued, lays out the first rigorous attempts to disclose an indigenous interpretation of the ‘pre-platonic’ philosophers. After a reflection upon

the ‘incomplete’ character of the former work, we will trace his scenario of the birth of tragic thought, as set forth in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, from out of a primal conflict betwixt the aesthetic forces of the Dionysian (Orpheus) and the Apollonian (Homer and Hesiod). Breaking free of the hold of either tradition, the archaic poet–thinkers created a new *morphos* (define) and network of tragic thinking, one which, however, was not a mere harmonization (Hegel), but a temporary, tragic *topos* of artistic expression.

We will next turn to Heidegger’s radical questioning of Nietzsche’s interpretation of ‘philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks’ with his own persistent emphasis upon the status of the primordial thinkers of Greece as having *first* apprehended ‘Being’. Heidegger seeks to clear away Nietzsche’s genealogical tracing of mytho–poetics and the ‘personality’ of the early Greek thinkers, in preference for his own radical indication of truth as *Aletheia*, a ‘Primordial Word’, of which, Heidegger claims, Nietzsche had no inkling.

In our final chapter on method, we will turn to the post-structuralists and their attempt to lay out an interpretive strategy, which would not only serve to disrupt the repetition of the *motif of the dawn*, prevalent in both Nietzsche and Heidegger, but also to set free Nietzsche’s genealogical tracing of tragic thought and poetics from Heidegger’s eccentric emphasis upon the ‘primordial thinkers’ of Greece, to the exclusion of the possibility of an understanding of the emergence of the tragic age from amid its own mytho–poetic context.

In light of our meditations upon perspective, we will first lay out a provisional sketch of the context of emergence that arises from the specific contributions of the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of an archaic life-world – of Being and Becoming, the Question of the First and of the Elements, and the Question of the Motive Force and Configuration of Change. In this light, the context of emergence will act as hermeneutic key and horizon of orientation for our interpretation of the specific topographies of early Greek thought. Beginning a ‘sketch’ of the Ionian thread of early Greek thought, I will turn to Thales, seeking to fathom the meaning of the specific features of his *thought* upon Being and Becoming – of not only his assertion of Water as the First, but of the divine circularity of the transmutation of the elements – *beyond* the anachronistic assertions that Thales was not only the ‘first philosopher’, but also a natural scientist. It will be in this way that the context of emergence will allow us to divine a reading of Thales which traces the precise influences upon his thought in its specificity.

We will next turn to the provocations of Anaximander, whose inferred criticisms of Thales will be the ‘prairie fire’ for the incipient conversation that was to become ‘philosophy’, a novel discourse of a *mixed* and unstable expression. In light of this emergent *topos* of contestation, we will turn to Anaximenes (‘Air’) and Xenophanes (‘Earth’), and, the ‘reasons’ each has given for his own position in relation to the *question of the first* as articulated by Thales and Anaximander. We will, in this way, invite each of the subsequent thinkers into the dynamic conversation of early philosophy, from Heraclitus, tragic thinker of flux – and the dice throw of the child (Nietzsche), to Pythagoras – an eternal recurrence of all, transmigration as a *complex symbola* (define), which shelters the Pythagorean *philosophia*, including its other aspects, ‘cosmology’, ‘music theory’, ‘mathematics’, ‘medicine’ and ‘ethics – amid a ‘poetic dwelling’.

We will also explore the ‘alleged’ challenge of Parmenides to all previous (and as it turned out, all future) modes of thought, in what has been repeated in the canon as a ‘breach’ not only to the ‘archaic’ traditions of mythological narratives and any thought which is tainted by these archaic mytho-poetic horizons. We will contest this interpretation through an exploration of the radical implication of Reiner Schürmann’s reminder to us that the goddess of Truth also revealed to the ‘thinker’ – to know also the ways of mortal thought. In this way, we will lay out a tragic reading of Parmenides which is distinct from those who either declare that Parmenides was the first ‘logician’ or who was a mere ‘ontologist’.

We will turn to Empedocles and Anaxagoras and their own responses to Parmenides – if there are any grounds for such an assertion. In light of our radical questioning of the canonical image of Parmenides, we will, after reviewing the ‘standard’ view, set forth a reading which emphasizes the continuity of horizons between Parmenides and the so-called ‘radical pluralists’. We will explore Empedocles’s disclosure of his doctrine of the Elements and of the two Roots, Love and Strife, which must tragically contend each with the other as they circle in a vortex, giving rise to the one and the many which separate off in a cycle of eternal recurrence. In this way, the question of the first is displaced into an explicit and perhaps non-foundationalist (Friedrich Niethammer) indication of the becoming of the *Kosmos*, an interpretation that is most radically disclosed in light of the context of emergence.

Anaxagoras, our next voice, can be regarded as calling into question the seeming lack of specificity of Empedocles as to the precise existence of specific objects. Moreover, it is, perhaps, for this reason that he suggested the *Nous* (Mind) and the seeds of ‘existence’ to account for the possibility of

such a specificity. Such a conception implies is that each thing – in line with Parmenides – must have existed, always. In this light, each thing exists as a ‘seed’ in everything else, and the ‘birth’ of any one ‘thing’ emerges from a ‘separating out’ of that which is always already there. Mind (*Nous*), a separate disseminates ‘separation’, and *originally* initiated the rotation (recall the vortex of Empedocles). In this way, ‘Mind’ replaces Love and Strife, but maintains the unity of opposites, except perhaps for that part of existence which is endowed with Mind. While this may be a plausible reading, it will be the context and the implications of the *Nous* which will be highlighted, with an emphasis upon the tragic continuity of Empedocles and Anaxagoras (with Parmenides amid the context of emergence) over against the anachronistic, canonical logic which would insist upon a clear and inevitable transition between Parmenides and Plato – to the exclusion of an ‘indigenous’ understanding of these thinkers.

Although it would seem that we are already caught by the spider of Plato, we need to resist the mere ‘coronation of reason’ with an *honest* encounter with Democritus, who, though a contemporary of Socrates, invokes an alternative narrative with respect to the alleged debate that had arisen in response to (or with) Parmenides. Again – we can argue that there is a tragic continuity between Parmenides and the so-called ‘radical pluralists’, one which obviates the question-begging trajectory which would assert the supremacy of Plato and the tradition which arises with his break with archaic mytho-poetics. Democritus shows clearly that the issue at hand is not the Mind in the sense of Socrates and Plato, as he, paying special tribute to Anaxagoras, dispenses of such a notion altogether. Democritus lays out his topography of ‘Atoms and the Void’ as a meditation upon the call of the Goddess for us to know Being *and* Becoming. Tragic thought – in any case . . . one that, however, is not merely random, in terms of our own contemporary notions of ‘chance’, but one attuned to Chance as Fate, a goddess, for which we thirst.

The last chapter on Plato ‘brings to a head’ the interpretive dilemma of anachronism in light of not only Socrates’s specific ridicule of Anaxagoras, but also of the deep prejudicial ‘image’ of the ‘ascending’ development of Greek thought. After our exploration of alternative readings of the tradition, we will turn to Plato and his own susceptibility to differing Janus-faced readings. We will acknowledge, in this context, an alternative reading which exceeds Nietzsche’s own merely repressive reading of Plato toward an interpretation which, as with the romantics, seeks to intimate an aesthetic Plato, one that is expressed in his affiliation with Beauty. Nevertheless, it will be shown that even this Plato remains susceptible to Nietzsche’s criticisms in

light of the apprehension of the lie of mere beauty amid the tragic economy of the sublime.

We will close with a brief exploration and criticism of Badiou's essay, 'Lacan and the Pre-socratics', to which we referred at the beginning, in which he merely repeats the canonical definitions of early Greek thought, with the addition of his own Lacanian insistence upon the two critical targets of this present study – that the 'Pre-socratics' broke with all existing forms of knowledge, and yet, however, these early thinkers remained in a state of 'primitivism' who persisted upon the level of *poiesis* as they were not capable of an access to the Real through mathematization (itself an absurd suggestion in light of Thales own prediction of an eclipse).

Our disclosure of the 'context of emergence' is specifically intended to disrupt such a reading, one which disappointingly merely echoes the canon without any questioning insight.

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I would like to thank, finally, my children Zoe, Soren and Venus for their conversation during the preparation of this work.



## Dating: A ‘Rough Sketch’

But some of the greatest achievements in philosophy could only be compared with taking up some books which seemed to belong together, and putting them on different shelves; nothing more being final about their positions than that they no longer lie side by side. The onlooker who doesn't know the difficulty of the task might well think in such a case that nothing at all had been achieved. (Wittgenstein, *Blue Book*, p. 44–45)

Gilgamesh	2500
Zoroaster	18th–10th century
Orpheus	Pre-Homeric
Musaeus	Pre-Homeric
Homer	850–
Hesiod	750–650
<i>Genesis</i>	7th century
Archilochus	680–645
Sappho	630–570
Thales	624–546
Anaximander	610–546
Anaximenes	585–528
Xenophanes	570–475
Pythagoras	570–495
Siddhārtha Gautama	563–483
Heraclitus	535–475
Aeschylus	525–455
Pindar	522–443
Parmenides	510–
Sophocles	496–406
Empedocles	490–430
Anaxagoras	500–428

Euripides	480–406
Democritus	460–370
Socrates	469–399
Aristophanes	446–386
Plato	428–348



## Part One

# Meta-Philosophy of Early Greek Thought



## Chapter 1

# The Motif of the Dawn, or on Gossip

### A

Dawn

Where the *Hesperides*—

lovely nymphs of

the evening—

*dance*—

**this**

joyous play – light, darkness

*on the street,*

*the coxswain beats his drum*

beginning . . . ending—

cockcrow . . . deathknell—

transition – inexorable

faces of indefinite-ness—

Dawn is the beginning of the day . . .

journey to the end of the night—

Dawn is war peace, disease health, hate love . . .

Evening is the beginning of night, the end of days.

Day passes over into night, night into day.

The sun rises – it also sets.

Ascends descends.

Day is the place, event, happening of light—

Night is the place, event, happening of darkness—

Day night, dawn evening, indefinite return, spiral of light darkness—

The inexorable day night, place, light darkness, dawn evening.

(Being becoming, One Many, Aletheia)

There is no pure light or pure darkness in the play of light darkness.

Twilight is the place of – *between* light darkness.

Twilight – betwixt ascension descension of sun, light darkness.

Twilight precedes dawn, evening,  
 betwixt day night, night day—  
 Twilight descends into night,  
 ascends toward dawn.  
 Play of light darkness – with day, light rules – with night, darkness rules.  
 (The ‘grammar’ of light and darkness, the ‘game’ with inexorable  
 ‘rules’).  
 Without darkness, light would not *birth* relief, perspective, space, body,  
*place*  
 In the Open, lightning needs a dark sky.  
 The Open is the place of day night, light darkness.  
 Darkness does not need light, but is never free of light—  
 Darkness surrounds, engulfs the light.  
 (There is only darkness *for us* in the deepest caves,  
 hidden from the light of day night).  
 The moon, stars inhabit a sky of darkness light, night day.  
 With the descent of the sun, eclipse of light,  
 Night returns in her recension to the eclipse.  
 Dawn, day *nearly* precedes the rise of the sun,  
 Beckons *this* return of light into the Open,  
 (although darkness is always there).  
 Evening, night is the eclipse of the sun,  
 return of moon and stars—  
 return – disclosure of darkness into the Open—  
 (We see the moon, stars during the day,  
 though they are eclipsed in obscurity).

The ‘West’ does not exist.

## B

The motif of the ‘dawn’ is a *saturated* trope in the self-expression of life (mortal, terrestrial), existence. I use the indication ‘motif’ – in the manner of Jacques Derrida in his essay ‘Différance’<sup>1</sup> – to intimate a figure of expression that is neither (or, is not to be considered primarily in the sense of) a *word* (in the procedure of etymological ‘essence’), or a *concept* (whether Platonic or Kantian, etc.), but as an intimation of a diverse and dynamic and ‘contagious’ (Krell) context of significance or meaning. Indeed, while the ‘dawn’ can be approached as a linguistic sign (composed of *morphemes*)

and as a concept that can be defined, signified ('Dawn is the break of day', 'the lighting of a region of a planet in rotation'), it becomes, as a motif, a polyvalent indication of reference which inhabits a 'nexus' of *defined* meanings and associated (whether synonymous, complementary or antonymous) motifs, such as Night, twilight, evening or morning. To a significant extent, the 'dawn', in its allegorical or metaphorical significance, becomes a figuration of poetry, rhetoric and thought, a motif which organises a context of meaning and expression in the event of a dissemination of perspective. In this light (another unnoticed metaphor), the motif is a malleable, *makeshift* expression, susceptible of myriad aspects, depending upon the contextual morphology of its expression. Nevertheless, despite the dispersion (*deferral* and *differing*) of the context of its significance, the motif, while not merely a substantive noun, nor a 'time' designation, expresses a persistent thematic, most notably that of 'beginning', or, perhaps more appropriately (and, ambiguously), emergence, or, with Heidegger, *unconcealment*.

In this sense, the 'dawn' (and its translative 'equivalents' in any planetary language) could be regarded, with Heidegger, as a primordial 'word' of *Muthos*, one, which like an artwork, organises a context for the disclosure of that which is 'there'. Of course, we could provisionally refer to the quasi-bedrock 'meaning' of the 'dawn' as the phenomenon of the 'lighting up of the world', as with the 'rising of the sun'. Such expression pretends to the possibility of an 'ideal language' of verifiable material propositions. Yet, even this 'system of propositions' always remains ironically metaphorical, susceptible of further and seemingly indefinite mutations or transferences 'across' and 'between' contexts. For instance, we no sooner speak of dawn as the 'lighting' bestowed by the 'rising sun', than we speak of a 'beginning', or, of 'emergence'. Moreover, beyond a merely 'objectiving' or descriptive discourse, we can speak of the 'dawn' as the emergence of thought and feeling, as such and such a notion or insight 'dawns upon me'. In this way, the motif is susceptible of diverse aspects of meaning, each of which revolves around a primordial root meaning, the ultimate significance of which (the 'for the sake of which') is dependent upon the precise and specific morphology of the context of emergence of the articulation, or self-expression of existence. Nietzsche already reminds us of the ultimate metaphorical character of language, of its fatal embedded-ness in *lies* – 'forms of life' and 'language games' (Wittgenstein echoing Nietzsche) of its 'there' (Heidegger). It is, in this way, that the significance of the motif is its play amidst its context of expression, one that it itself organises, though does not determine as to the precise significance of meaning that will temporarily emerge. (Indeed, it is possible that the very linguistic sign 'dawn'



could, with Ferdinand de Saussure, attain the essentially arbitrary meaning of 'chair' in some other context of significance.) There are other decisions and over-determinations which participate in the configuration of a context, one that itself is always subject to contestation (Michel Foucault). In this light, not only is the motif of the dawn cast into dispersion across a metaphorical *topos* of significance (the motif is revealed as radically ambiguous and technically self-contradictory according to the usual, habitual, positivistic 'definition' of the dawn as unitary, as a discrete, precise and decidable event or meaning), but it is one that may be 'put to use' within specific 'purposive' contexts (for Derrida, the suppressions of *différance* in the establishment of 'identity' logic; for Wittgenstein, 'bewitchment', 'captivation' to an exclusive 'grammar'; for Heidegger the *un-worlded* logistics of technical philosophy).

In this way, that which illuminates the significance of the motif is neither the sense of a material proposition, nor a logical reduction of meaning, but its context of emergence, one, as with the *principle of individuation* in Gottfried Leibniz, the European (including the British) Romantics and Idealists, Arthur Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, etc., in which the sense of *the being that is* is disclosed through the 'totality' of relations which simultaneously disclose the motif and the context of its significance. Such a principle, it is readily granted, itself undergoes a tragic dissolution between Leibniz and Derrida – though, whether as a self-contained onto-theology or an open-ended dispersion of a semantic field, it is the 'place', the 'context' which serves, however tentatively, as the *topos* of orientation for the expression and dissemination of meaning or sense. For example, even amid such disseminal texts as Meister Eckhart – or James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, there arises myriad potentializing aspects and contexts of significance, even if only as makeshifts which dissolve with their very emergence.

## Γ

The purpose of the preceding hyper-reflection upon the nature of the 'motif', in this case that of the 'dawn', is to prepare the reader for the 'method of meditation' (Bataille) and strategy of hermeneutics and critical analysis that is underway across the pages of this text. For, prior to our consideration of the uses and abuses (Nietzsche) of the motif of the dawn amid the bland historicity of Western thought, we must become awakened to the very instability of the motif *as such*, not only regarding its overt contextualizing operations, but also its own simultaneous contextualization (Friedrich

Schlegel's 'reciprocal determination')<sup>2</sup> with respect to a vast array of aspect disclosures and embedded interpretive decisions.

The notional context in the present study is, of course, early Greek thought. As we will see in the following pages, however, even this alleged unitary phenomenon will have its own contexts of emergence amidst the dispersion of background horizons and semantic fields – the places of its 'dawn'.

Yet, before we can even begin to consider 'early Greek thought', our gaze must turn back upon ourselves as the questioners, as the (finite) interpreters. Of course, the danger lies in the possibility that 'we' will merely dive into the Aetna of 'idle chatter', into the echo chambers of ideology and gossip (we are already there, though we do not admit it), of the cliché-matrices, which facilitate and guide our 'everyday' intercourse with the 'life of the mind' (Hannah Arendt), counting off the hours (Friedrich Hölderlin on Empedocles).

Of course, I am speaking of the most massive elephant in the room, that the 'Greeks' were not only the dawn of 'Western' philosophy, but also of the dawn of 'Western' civilization itself. The 'Greeks', these eternal children celebrated by Plato in his *Phaedrus*, are those who lived the archetype of the 'good life' at the dawn of 'our' own existence – assuming, of course, the reader 'identifies' with such a 'determination' – or, consents to such an assignment within an ideological projection, one that is underpinned by a persuasive mythological meta-narrative. What is the meaning of this assertion, that the 'Greeks' – the existence of the 'Greeks' – constitute the *dawn* of 'Western' civilization? While it will be quite a task to illustrate the specificities of this assertion in reference to the topography of 'Western' thought, and the myriad interpretations of the significance and meaning of this assertion – the very assertion itself takes us aback, if that is, 'we' are not necessarily in consent to the casual and seemingly 'unconscious' assent to the 'we', of the ideological mythology of 'Western' civilization.

We need only think of the similar expression – the 'dawn of civilization', or the 'cradle of civilization', in this instance, the affinity of the motifs of 'dawn' and 'birth' being disclosed. Yet, 'Greece' is not regarded as the 'dawn of civilization' in the meta-narratives which mortals share upon the earth at this moment. Indeed, as Plato testifies, and as the 'Greeks' were instructed by an Egyptian priest – they are children, timely, ultimately tragic.<sup>3</sup> As we have heard in the savage, chattered narratives of our times, Babylon and Mesopotamia – contemporary Iraq – *were* (especially, perhaps, before the ongoing series of war crimes) the 'cradle of civilization' – this place of many names is also the more recent mythological *topos* of the land

of Eden and the Fall, associated with the Jewish, Christian and Islamic 'faiths'. But, what is the difference between the 'dawn' of 'civilization' and the 'dawn' of 'Western' 'civilization'? Or, to put this question uneasily in the language of the 'later' Heidegger, why has the 'land of evening' situated its 'origin' in a *topos* which is not that of the 'dawn' of the Eastern (or even Near Eastern) horizon, but one which is seemingly, and predictably, *in-between* (at least, geographically, or even mythologically, intellectually, culturally?) – if, that is, we cannot ever truly speak of 'East' or 'West', 'up' or 'down', etc. (Heraclitus)?

What is the meaning of the 'breach' between 'East' and 'West'?

But, still inhabiting the 'conceptual framework' of gossip – idle chatter, ideology – we look around us and see that we inhabit a 'tradition' – an echo chamber – which testifies to its own 'origin' in 'Greek' civilization and 'Greek' literature, philosophy and/or thought. We have already expressed our astonishment at such self-confident and self-assured assertions. Yet, our own parochial histories are circumscribed by such assertions concerning the 'dawn'. It is possible that what we say about our 'Greek' origins has nothing at all to do with the 'Greeks'. Nevertheless, everyone (except for our post-structuralists, and Jewish, Radical Orthodox and Islamic theologians) says that the 'Greeks' are *radical* (as a root) not only to our 'civilization', but also to our philosophical 'epoch' and 'tradition'. At the same time, there is such intense disagreement concerning the meaning of the 'dawn' that we become engulfed in the war within this 'tradition' to the exclusion – in distraction from – the question as to the 'mystical foundation'<sup>4</sup> of its authority as a 'tradition'. None of this is *said* – in the context of gossip – to suggest that the 'Greeks' are not indeed radical to an interpretation and expression of the 'truth' of mortal existence, but instead to call into question, to expose, the mythological basis (and, thus, the hypocrisy) of 'our own' contemporary meta-narratives regarding the 'origins' of 'Western', 'Occidental' philosophy.

## Δ

The war over the 'Greeks' – specifically with regards to the early Greek thinkers – in the 'Western' 'tradition' can be cast into relief as both nuanced and oftentimes brutal variations of the distinction between the 'primitive' and the 'primordial'. As I have already suggested, there is no dispute among the canonists over the Greek origins of the Western philosophical, scientific and socio-political 'order'. Such a notion already implies a specific

conception of historicity and of its 'development'. We are surrounded by many of these contesting and contested histories. Even with Hesiod of the Archaic period, there was the myth of the Five Ages of Man. Our manner of constructing a history, and one that expresses the notions of continuity amid development, is in truth a genealogy (Nietzsche) or with Foucault, a 'history of the present'. All histories, however wrapped up in the trapping of 'objective scientific method' or 'precise systematic retrieval', are inexorably self-reflexive constructions guided by the intentional necessities of any particularized 'present'. As war has jurisdiction over all things (Heraclitus), there is no History, but contesting and contested histories, stories, myths about ourselves and our own 'origins' and significance. Yet, since these *likely* stories are disseminated amidst a *topos* of contestation, of agonistic life upon the surface, there will be diverse stories, each of which seeks to conjure forth a hegemonic perspective upon 'that which is' – as with an open-ended and undecided Wittgensteinian 'language game' or a 'form of life' that is merely a makeshift topography of contestation and mutability. In this way, our earlier distinction itself between 'primitive' and 'primordial' may seem to be equally reductive – though its significance, and its persistent refinement in the following, will allow us to illuminate a workable perspective upon the interpretive significance of early Greek thought, one which will and must remain open and subject to continuous revision.

The field of contestation is the habitat for the surfacing of a vast array of perspectives. It should be mentioned at the outset that the survival of the fragments of the early Greeks in the writings of others, even in the early Church officials, testifies to their historical influence and significance. This is also the case with the extant writings of Plato and Aristotle with their exile among the Arabs, not to mention the very doxographic compilers and writers, such as Diogenes Laertius and Simplicius.

Yet, the tenor of the meta-perspective which regards the early Greeks as 'primitive' is perhaps set by Socrates in his criticism of Anaxagoras (but also, perhaps by the early Greeks themselves in light of Heraclitus and Xenophanes). It is said that Socrates, intrigued by what he heard about Anaxagoras's notion of Mind, *Nous*, obtained a copy of the blasphemous philosopher's book. Yet, upon consulting the text, Socrates, echoing the critical fervour of Xenophanes, expressed his astonishment that such a book, though it mentions Mind quite often, has such little *Mind* in it. Of course, this quip by Socrates is self-serving on Plato's part as it begs the question of a Mind with specific ideas, an innovation, which, as we will see, is the essential meaning of Platonic philosophy. Indeed, it is this latter philosophy which itself constitutes the event by which early Greek thought has

been regarded – or measured – throughout much of the epoch of ‘Occidental’ or ‘Western’ philosophy. This regard or measurement pertains moreover not only to the regard of Plato and Platonism – and later Aristotle and Aristotelianism – towards the early Greek thinkers, but also, and perhaps most emphatically, to our own construction of meta-philosophical narratives within the so-called ‘history of philosophy’ or ‘history of ideas’. For, not only have Plato and Aristotle asserted themselves as the successors and surpassers (Georg Hegel) of the early Greek philosophers, but we ourselves have also propagated a ‘history of philosophy’ in which we entitled an entire epoch of philosophy as ‘pre-socratic’ or ‘pre-platonic’. Why is this the case?

These designations themselves testify to the essential lack of ‘sovereignty’ (Bataille) given to these thinkers to be understood upon their own ‘ground’, amid the horizons of their own contexts of emergence. Plato is utterly duplicitous – like a broken rib – he seizes hold of, appropriates, primordial aspects of early Greek thought, especially the thought of Heraclitus, Parmenides and Pythagoras (Philolaus), but all at once, dismisses their ultimate significance as lovers of ‘truth, beauty and the good’. We have already recalled the sarcasm of Socrates with respect to Anaxagoras. Yet, it is perhaps the Platonic–Socratic rejection of tragedy and thought inspired by tragic insight that is most significant in our comprehension of the *breach* that is Platonism. A similar, and perhaps related, *breach* takes place in the official calendar of Western ‘history’ with the alleged birth of Jesus of Nazareth, reputed to be the ‘Christ’ – the one who will save ‘us’ from the tragedy of mortal existence. Why is this the case?

In his repudiation of the poets, Plato disenfranchises most, if not all, of the early Greek thinkers (even the radical Xenophanes was a poet), but more importantly, he dispels the thought and poet–thinkers of the tragic myth – and thus, sabotages the very possibility of an indigenous self-interpretation of existence upon the *topos* of the ‘primordial word’, that of the *Muthos* (Heidegger), a primal temporal expression which allows thought to break out into the open, as food for thought. If philosophy arises in the tragic age, and is the thought of the tragic in light of the finitude of existence – then, what is Plato, as the nihilistic creator of the ‘theoretical man’ (Nietzsche), and the habitat of the latter in the restricted economy (Bataille) of the *polis*?

Though many have given answers to this question, we will focus not on Plato, for his own sake, but upon the complex relation that is articulated between the latter formal indicator and early Greek thought in our own persistent mythology of the meta-philosophical significance of ‘Western

philosophy'. What is philosophy? *Western* philosophy? Can an account of the 'origins' aid us in our attempt to answer this question? But, for 'reasons' that are philosophically obvious, there can be no incontestable 'history of the present' – and thus, neither of the so-called 'bleeding' past. Yet, as Bataille has poignantly suggested, the contention that there can be an 'absence of myth', of being and perspective – mortal, tragic interpretation – is indeed, the greatest of all myths. All self-reflection, as Hölderlin intimates, takes place in the 'imagination',<sup>5</sup> amidst temporality, the 'energetic' *topos*, *tiger*<sup>6</sup> of the general economy of thought.

We can ascertain from overwhelming 'evidence' that there was a deliberate, resolved attempt on the Plato to distance himself and his 'philosophical production' from the 'archaic' thinkers and tragic poets of Greece. This ironic self-description as the 'ideal', though failed liberator – his 'modernity' – on the part of Plato has been echoed throughout a 'network' of historical repetitions, as the latter steps in for Aristotle, and vice versa, in the tag team event of the 'history of philosophy.' Whitehead declared that all philosophy is a footnote to Plato. Since Aristotle is a student of Plato, he is also subsumed under this footnote. The influence of each of these philosophers – and combinations and hybrids thereof – have been essentially determinate for the current epoch of philosophy, which as the history of being (Heidegger), is not only the only epoch of philosophy, but also one of irretrievable *errancy* (Nietzsche and Heidegger in light of the Anaximander fragment). For both Plato, in his own era – not to mention Aristotle for the moment – and for our own contemporaries, the thinkers before Plato are not properly philosophers, but pre-cursors to the *matheme* of genuine truth (Badiou), of mathematics and intelligible ideas as the only access to Reality. Though they are the 'dawn', they are not the 'sun'. The 'pre-socratic', 'pre-platonic' philosophers merely announce the rising of the sun, though this dawn, though essential, in this perspective, as a contestation of myth, is ultimately merely a period of transition to a genuine philosophical method.

While it may be possible that this *primitive* thought could indeed be an indication of the openness to the truth of Being and existence, it is also clear for Plato, such a perspective – tragic, pessimistic, romantic – can see only a tainted beauty, a 'crack in everything' (Leonard Cohen) that is enacted in the tragic destination of mortal life and singularity.

Such a mixed character, this impurity is expelled by Plato – indeed, it is why Socrates had sacrificed a cockerel to Asclepius, the healing son of Apollo. Life, as Socrates tells his disciples, is a 'sickness unto death' (Søren Kierkegaard), the body is the 'prison house of the soul' (Plato's *Republic*

[*Politeia*], and later with Plotinus). There is health, soul and life for Plato, beyond the world of *physis* (conceived in distinction from Plato, with Heidegger, under the aspect of *aletheia*, truth as unconcealment), of the tragic meta-perspective of *Muthus*, words expressed amidst the *topos* of the 'insurmountable' horizons of mortal existence and the tragico-comic 'eternal recurrence of the same'. Of course, it is questionable – as we will see in our interpretation of Nietzsche's sense of tragedy, health and the 'meaning' of Apollo, whether such a sacrifice (or any sacrifice) would be at all acceptable to Asclepius or Apollo. Nevertheless, in the present context, we can see that the 'groundwork' has been laid for an 'interpretation' of early Greek philosophy as 'primitive'. Indeed, if the 'Greeks' are children, as Plato instructs us in his *Phaedrus*, then the early Greeks are merely infants – perhaps, even *enfants terrible* (Jean Cocteau).

(It may be possible that Plato glimpsed the possibility of the current interpretation of early Greek thought, but recoiled in horror.)

It was Aristotle who 'consolidated' his master Plato's *coup d'état* over 'philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks'. Despite the melodrama of conflict between Plato and Aristotle which seems to constitute the entirety of the history of philosophy in all of its variations, it is certain that this conflict is indeed an incestuous symbiosis that acts to exclude, conceal 'possibilities' of existence and truth which preceded (and, perhaps, post-date) the current epoch of the *last man*, of 'theoretical man'. Aristotle almost seems to come from a later time, his editors and interpreters have made him anachronistic to himself. Quite a distance from the urgency of the 'death of Socrates' or even the 'Pythagorean Riots', Aristotle sits down to assemble fields of study, recorded as accounts, preserved in books – these themselves subject to massive and utter transformations, translations, appropriations . . . Nevertheless, in the current context, the text of Aristotle has had seminal implications for our understanding and misunderstanding of early Greek thought.

Aristotle, in his *Physics*, has constructed a histrionic 'projection' upon 'events', which lays out not only a 'history of philosophy' to date (himself, with Hegel, as the culmination of Spirit), but also establishes a beginning of philosophy in Thales, and, thus, articulates a meta-philosophical statement upon the meaning of 'philosophy'. Thales is the *first* 'physicist', the *first* to break with mythology and engage in authentic philosophical, scientific thought. Yet, we already go too far into the *modernist* world of science and alleged secularism (we always stink of religion). Aristotle takes this beginning as a license to establish the 'sciences', those which Edmund Husserl would call 'regional phenomenologies', determined and contextualized by the 'matters themselves'. In a similar manner to Abraham's (from Genesis)



earlier composition of the 'Myth of Eden',<sup>7</sup> Aristotle is attempting to justify his own 'phenomenology of existence', and his own authority, posthumously, as 'The Philosopher'. Aristotle treats the early Greek thinkers with playful ridicule and authoritative dismissal. Truly, it is a wonder why he mentions them at all in his *Physics*, considering the facile dismissals to which each of them is subjected.

But, as with Plato, his relation to the early Greeks is also duplicitous (which reflects Alcibiades and Socrates), as with the ambiguous relationships of the succession of divinities in Hesiod's *Theogony*. As with the alleged responses to Parmenides by Empedocles and Anaxagoras, Aristotle is critical of Plato's hierarchy between the intelligible and sensible realms of existence, between the Idea and the existent being. What seems to follow from such a stark division is in effect the non-intelligibility of the sensible world. Aristotle's doctrine of the Four Causes,<sup>8</sup> for instance, is designed to demonstrate the *banal* intelligibility of the sensible world. Divorced from the context of tragedy, however, he uses the growth of an acorn into an oak tree as his example through which he will draw out his causes. If it is the case that there can be no knowledge in the sensible world, it would seem that the growth of an oak tree from an acorn would be inexplicable, or would be deemed to be merely the knowledge of mortals as revealed by the Goddess of Parmenides. Of course, we remember that She felt that this mortal knowing, as perhaps a showing, is also important, and that its very mention implies that such knowledge is possible – (Schürmann). Nevertheless, there remains an theoretical affinity between the Four Causes and the Divided Line, especially, if, with Socrates, we compare Aristotle's doctrine of Causes with Anaxagoras' notion of mixture – in its dismissive, authoritative interpretation – that everything *is* in everything, including hair, bone, etc. Aristotle learned the Socratic lesson of the 'Mind' and 'Ideas', but instead of keeping these apart, as did Plato in his neo-Parmenidean doctrine of 'Forms', situated these 'causes' as the flux of 'actuality' itself. In this way, it could be argued that Aristotle is a further elaboration of Heraclitus's notion of the *logos* as an intimate source of *episteme* (knowing). It was Aristotle's innovation to appropriate this notion amid a non-tragic topography of 'causes' and a self-moved mover. For Heraclitus, knowledge of the world in flux is possible through the *logos*, the lightning bolt of Zeus which tragically steers all things – a radical notion which Aristotle surreptitiously adopts, though in a manner which re-contextualizes this insight into the practise of 'scientific philosophy'.

Nevertheless, both Plato and Aristotle are both 'theoretical men' – their differences in this way pale in comparison to their departure, break from



the thinkers of the tragic age. Yet, for these philosophers, such a ‘breach’ is regarded as a mark of maturation, of growth toward an apex, from out of the trough and immaturity of early Greek thought. Yet, can we ever be sure of even these interpretations of Plato and Aristotle, given the *disseminal* notion of a ‘context of emergence’? Surely – there may be a tragic Plato or Aristotle, even if such a possibility has remained *unsaid*.<sup>9</sup>

We are engulfed on all sides by histrionics – the methodologies of story-telling from any particular motivated perspective. Perhaps, it will be with a glance at Aristotle’s rendition of tragedy in his *Poetics* – and in juxtaposition with Nietzsche’s own, in chapter 3, that we may attempt to comprehend the precise influence of contexts of interpretation and of the pernicious suppressions of anachronistic erasures.

## E

Of course, such a chiasmus of stories and meta-narratives, as temporal constructions, expressions, may and do undergo significant breaks – endings, new beginnings, substitutions, echoes and retrievals . . . not to mention survivals, translations, etc. For instance, ‘Greek’ learning itself is said to have disappeared from Europe for nearly 1,000 years, between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance. While such a depiction is not absolutely the case – as references survived in popular works such as the condemned Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* (Hypatia has already been torn to pieces by the Christian mob) and in polemical and rhetorical statements not only in the Bible but also in the texts of the early Church fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria and the ‘neo-platonist’ Augustine (a beginner of his own, one that allows us to see him beyond his own alleged neo-platonism), the centre of Greek learning did in fact shift to the Near Eastern Arabs, not to be retrieved until the ‘cultural diffusion’ of the Crusades. Indeed, it is with the seminal work of translation by priestly scholars such as Marsilio Ficino that the Greeks were finally established as the one of the ideological pillars of Western science, philosophy and culture. Of course, it could be readily argued, that as with the Islamic Arabs, the status of Greek philosophy and science were always held to be second to that of revealed Christian religion. This secondary status of Aristotle amongst the Islamics – ‘The Philosopher’ – could be seen moreover as a partial echo of the status of the Greeks in the Roman era, who were merely slaves to a ruling, ‘productive’ class.

In this way, the retrieval of Greek philosophy in the Renaissance had two determining effects upon its reception in Christian Europe, and later in regards to its meaning in early Modern and Modern philosophy, and which is

an intense issue still in our current cultural era. On the one hand, the overriding significance of the 'Greeks', especially in the writings of Aristotle and Galen, Hippocrates – lay in *physics* – in 'scientific' learning. One may wish to counter such a contention with the example of Plato and neo-platonism in their emphatic relevance to theology, religion and spirituality, but it must be recognized immediately that even such doctrines, while they maintained a mystical, pagan and occult existence in the underground of European cultural history, were themselves transformed in order to conform to the dominant Christian meta-narrative of Medieval, early Modern, and Modern Europe. (one could contend that the Inquisition has never left us, even in our hyper-relative world of post-modernity). Nevertheless, with the secondary status of philosophy to theology, we can ascertain a rival motif in the determination of the Greeks, if, indeed, this is only meant to refer to the cacophonous darkness of Greek polytheism (idolatry). To this extent, from the Christian testimony in its slogan that the Christ is the light of the world, it is with Christian salvation that the motif of the dawn becomes associated – the motif does not disappear, it is merely transferred to a novel complex of significations, operative within an emergent and evolving contextual, situational era, epochality. On the other hand, as we have alluded, it is the aura of the Renaissance to be the 'rebirth' of Greek learning, of philosophy, science, and most intensely art, as the awakening of the sensuous body into the light (Vasari)<sup>10</sup>. Such emergent *polysemy*, difference itself expresses a contestation in the motif with reference to Christ as the light of the world. In this sense, the Dawn has come again, a new dawn, a rebirth or that which was already born – a complex motif attuned to the doctrine of transmigration as it was re-appropriated during the Renaissance from the recently translated (from Arabic) Platonic and Pythagorean texts. From this perspective, the most un-Greek of ages, that between the seventh and tenth centuries were re-cast as the 'Dark Ages' – for 'good' Christians, perhaps, the era of the greatest light.

In this light, this rebirth of another dawn was not without its birth pangs, and it took several centuries for the Renaissance 'ideal of science' to come to fruition, but increasingly, given the hegemony of the Christianity (in each of its Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant guises) prone to a non-religious meaning and significance – hence scientific 'Enlightenment'. Of course, in the modern period, there are exceptions to those who, as with René Descartes and Leibniz (and even down to Immanuel Kant) capitulated to religious authority for the sake of the limited rights of philosophy and science. We need only mention Giordano Bruno, who was burned at the stake in Rome in 1600 for heresy. In this way, we could contend that our reception of the Greeks is still a work of *incompletion*, even from the perspective of the Enlightenment, which is the slogan for the Modernist era in

philosophy and science. (Even Kant, concerned about the Enlightenment in his 1784 essay, bows to religious authority with his distinction between the 'private' and 'public' intellectual in the Preface to his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*) Yet, again, the specific character of these disciplines, and ultimately of our reception of the 'Greeks', has been so thoroughly influenced by the context of assimilation of Christianity (and indeed, of all Judaic and post-Judaic revealed religions) that some have declared, as with Slavoj Žižek, that we – even now – are inherently and irretrievably 'Christian'.

Heidegger calls Nietzsche – amid his ongoing dialogue and confrontation with the latter from the beginning to the end of his career – the discoverer of the 'Greeks'. Of course, this statement has no meaning as a substantive, material proposition, as it is obvious that European civilization, and indeed much of the so-called civilised world, had for a long time contact with and knowledge of the 'Greeks'. Needless to say, Heidegger's meaning is that Nietzsche discovered a certain sense of what it means to be Greek in his retrieval of 'philosophy in the tragic age', that such a philosophy was not the product of 'cheerfulness', but the excession of an agonistic cultural world of conflict. It could be argued that Nietzsche had discovered the philosophy of the early Greeks, in distinction to that of Plato and Aristotle. It would then be Nietzsche's philological talent of drawing fine distinctions that would earn our gratitude towards him. However, while this is the case, that Nietzsche explicitly seeks to unfold the topography of Greek thought into differing periods, and even to assert the priority of one period over the other, it must be to the former insight that we owe our gratitude – and these insights lie primarily in his early *Birth of Tragedy* and in his later *Twilight of the Idols*. Such an insight, as I will argue in the chapter three, is not radically disclosed in his early unpublished manuscript *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. At the same time, although we can consent to the notion that Nietzsche discovered the agonistic abyss of the culture of early, archaic Greece – the age of tragedy – we can also locate the intimation of similar views in his precursors, not only his teachers Jacob Burckhardt and Richard Wagner (*Opera and Drama*, in which he mentions the distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian), but also most prominently in his childhood hero Hölderlin and in the other early German Romantics.

## Z

Romantic *hermeneutics*, in the manner of Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Schliermacher and Johann Herder engages intimately with the meaning of

‘texts’, not from the future, which is our present, but rather from the cultural horizon amidst which they occurred – their *context of emergence*.

The early philosophers *enacted* a sustained questioning with regard to the meaning and *morphe* of existence, but, we can only access this questioning through their context of significance. A guiding clue to the emergence of philosophy may come from Patôcka’s *Plato and Europe*,<sup>11</sup> on the difference between myth and philosophy. The latter is merely seen as the sedimentation of ‘time’, while the latter is conceived as a temporal criticism in the manner of an ‘event’ of questioning. Yet, is he ‘correct’ in his rather sharp distinction or can we trace a genealogy from myth to philosophy in which philosophy is comprehended as arising from out of the poetic and mythological traditions? Can mythology perhaps be philosophical, can philosophy be mythological? Can there be a compromise position in which the mythological context, and the deep structures of myth are preserved in the incipient philosophy, but that the inquiry itself is imbued with the spirit of questioning – of freedom and creative perspective?

In its most general meaning, philosophy, as this strange ‘thinking for oneself’, of the self-interpretation of existence, is a response to the predicament of existence, a response that is characterised by a desire to understand the ‘mystery’ of existence. In order to understand the emergence of philosophy, of tragic thought, we must retrieve the original, radical impetus of questioning, persisting in the awareness of its contextual horizons as these were originally disseminated through mythological poetics.

We could perhaps contend, with Heidegger, that the early Greek philosophers were themselves attempting to retrieve the original impetus of radical questioning from out of the traditional conventionalism of myth, to think for themselves in an appropriation of the often conflicting aspects of these myths (cf. Chapter 3). While we need not accept this scenario, the latter would still imply that the early Greek thinkers did not reject the old culture, they added to it, with an original attempt to reinterpret it. Philosophy, in this ‘view’, is nothing more than a historically and culturally situated discussion which develops along the lines of the individuals involved in the conversation. The way in which we understand these myriad ‘origins’ has a fundamental impact upon our entire interpretation. We have to ‘deconstruct’ the constructions around us so as to begin to clear a place for a hermeneutic exploration of early philosophy. We must become aware that our very way of looking at the world is based upon received assumptions, presuppositions and prejudices of preceding generations of thinkers. We must also understand that these constructed meanings can be taken apart.

Of course, once the floodgates are removed, as it is done with post-structuralism and in the contemporary emergence of apophatic theologies, it becomes increasingly difficult – or even impossible (irony) – to assert a ‘positivity’ without ‘violence’ or constraining limit, and the explicit exposure of such ‘violence’ in the moment of its emergence. In such an ‘identity in difference’, amidst the general economy of an epoch (which does not necessarily, or even ever did rely upon the bland ‘positings’ and ‘positions’ of subjective consciousness in the modernist self-mythologization) – ‘anything goes’, as Paul Feyerabend declares in his anarchist text upon the ‘philosophy of science’, *Against Method*.<sup>12</sup> The deep sense of Feyerabend’s battle cry has two significant implications for our current exploration of early Greek thought. On the one hand, it is clear that we can never ‘get rid’ of gossip, as much as we can jump over our own shadow. On the other hand, there is, even with the banal persistence of idle chatter, the possibility of myriad discourses and approaches – sources, influences and styles – amid our own exploration of truth. The upshot of Derrida’s *Differance* is that any attempt to exclude must be negotiated.

### What is the criteria?

It is in this light that we can interpret the inexorable fog that has surrounded the early German Romantic (not to mention the British Romantic) attitude to the ‘Greeks’, and our very attitudes to Romanticism or any other discourse that lies outside of the ‘curriculum’. The usual stereotypes abound, echo, of the Romantic, of brooding, eccentric, erratic intellectuals, poets, artists, musicians, thrown amid a dire *ethos*, ‘drugs’, an errant way of life, often, and almost prescriptively ‘tragic’. We know all the stories, all the gossip. Beyond the cultural aesthetic and literary interests of the Romantic, re-played ever-recurrently in each generation, there is the ‘picture’ of the Romantic, one in common currency in academia and scholarly circles and networks that the Romantics wished to return to the ‘Golden Age’ of Greece. This was the image of, for instance, Hölderlin, certainly Byron, Shelley, Keats, etc. and much later, in what some may argue are cases of stipulated neo-romanticism, Nietzsche and Heidegger. This would then be another instance and sense of the ‘dawn’, an ‘aesthetic’, as opposed to a ‘scientific’ ‘dawn’ – although this would be far too easy – and wrong.

While such characterizations may be ‘correct’ according to certain superficial criteria, our understanding of the specificities of the engagement of the Romantics with ‘Greece’ – and later with Nietzsche and Heidegger – will

only become manifest through a consideration of the context of their emergent expression. Terry Pinkard has portrayed the sprawling decadence in 'Germany' amid an era of revolutionary disruption in Europe. Not only France, but also Greece was a focus of such disruption as it sought its independence from the Ottoman Empire. In this light, Byron's parlance in Greek poetry is not the immature imposture of a school boy, but is a re-awakening of a remembrance of the independence and greatness of Greece amid a struggle for which he himself died. As Nietzsche writes in his *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, men such as this once lived, they can live once more – *de capo*. Hölderlin was – and Shelley, Coleridge – inspired and agitated by the seminal events of revolutionary France. It is interesting that none of these three, in distinction for instance from Wordsworth and his sister, were ever truly disaffected by the revolution, even of the so-called 'Terror', but that each in his own way, learned to incorporate 'strife' and 'violence' into their poetics and philosophy. Shelley (not to mention his sister, Mary) moved increasingly toward the motif of strife, as we can see, for instance, from a juxtaposition of 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' to 'The Mask of Anarchy'. Keats began with poems about flowers and ended up as the spokesman of the Lamia, by whom he was soon taken. Coleridge began with vague historical epics, but eventually began to engage with the works of the German Romantic and idealist philosopher Friedrich Schelling, who exalted 'evil' as the groundless ground of human freedom. Byron, as we have said, died tragically of fever in Greece.

It is said that Hölderlin worshipped the Greek gods directly and intimately and that many of his poems should be regarded as prayers. Yet, such a statement barely ascends out of the vortex of gossip as it tells us nothing at all – regarding, for instance, the meaning of 'gods' versus 'God' or even the One (*hen*). Hölderlin – as Blake had already done – moves away from the ideal, dream of beauty, of a Platonic harmony of the spheres, to one that is disrupted by the event of violence amid existence, across the terrain of individuation, of strife. Hölderlin, like the other Romantics, committed to revolution, moves toward an assimilation of violence, strife, into his poetic philosophy with a shift from the Plato and neo-platonism – and from the Spinoza's 'One and All' – toward that of Empedocles, the poetic thinker of 'Love' and 'Strife'. Hölderlin can serve to express this transfiguration of existence as expressed in his fragmentary tragedy, 'The Death of Empedocles', a text which is translated and given extended commentary by Veronique Foti and Krell. It will be in this way that we can avoid the chatter and gossip concerning Romantic expressions of tainted beauty (Plato) or of a fragmentation of totality, a fracturing of the whole (Baruch Spinoza).

Nietzsche and Heidegger, as we can see, were not the only – or the first – to concern themselves with the early Greeks. Though, in the case of these thinkers, it seems that we always find the ‘beginning’ only when we have come to the very last . . . it could be argued that both Nietzsche and Heidegger developed, as did Hölderlin, philosophically in tandem with their own respective deeper and more mature appreciations of the early Greeks.

(Let us not forget that Karl Marx wrote his doctoral dissertation on the late ‘outsiders’ of the Platonic *polis*, Democritus and Epicurus, showing his ‘irrational’ preference for the latter and his ‘swerve’ – theoretical violence contra self-organising ‘systems’ (Bakūnin)).

Nevertheless, without going too far into their interpretations of the early Greeks, it is clear, as we have suggested, that each of these thinkers sought to retrieve that which is essential from amid their own respective engagements with ‘Greece’. These are other senses of the ‘Dawn’. While it would not be exactly clear from Nietzsche’s unpublished work *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* why we should wish to retrieve these men – other than their commonplace scientific acuity, progenitors, there is a more urgent suggestion concerning the ‘dawn’ in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this context, and if we link this discussion to his *The Genealogy of Morals* (and perhaps *Zarathustra*, *Twilight* and the *Anti-Christ*, etc.), it is the extirpation of Dionysian life and wisdom – of music and the chorus, of poetry – under the knowledge and ‘truth regime’ of ‘theoretical man’ that calls us to the barricades. The ‘Dawn’ is not just that of the ‘Greeks’, but the early Greeks (as opposed to the ready identification of the ‘Greeks’ with Plato and Aristotle) – the Greeks of the tragic age, most notably exhibited, exemplified in tragic poetry, in Attic tragedy. It is in this way, for Nietzsche, that the early Greeks are ‘primordial’ – as opposed to ‘primitive’ – a perspective that flew and flies in the face of nearly the entire of philosophical history, since, at least, Plato.

Heidegger, in his own portrayal of the trajectories of historicity, who, while, as we will see, has many fundamental disagreements with Nietzsche, remains deeply in tune with inherent ‘Nietzschean’ meta-textures. Yet, as with Hegel, there seems to be a limit placed upon Nietzsche, upon his ‘excessive’ style and his ‘indefinite’ topography. There have been many ‘dawns’, each of which can be traced to its ‘events’.

## H

Heidegger – inhabiting the same questionable space as Hegel in his *Philosophy of History* and his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (‘tragic’ ethicality as



reconciliation) – lays out, not only an *epochality* of primordial historicity, but also, the prospect of another ‘dawn’, in the manner of Nietzsche.

Heidegger, as we will see, is highly critical and dismissive of ‘Nietzsche’ with respect to his interpretation of the early Greek thinkers. He states in his lectures on Parmenides that philosophy does not arise out of mythology. At the same time, it is asserted that primordial thought inhabits and expresses *Muthos*. What is being expressed, thought here? Perhaps, mythology – the ‘tablets’ of another ‘time’ (as with Patôcka) – that is fixated, bewitched by past thoughts/expressions of that which indefinitely is, but, it is with *Muthos* that thought can be open to and create narratives of being in the moment. But, is this not Zarathustra with his Old and New Law Tablets?

The question of a Heideggerian ‘dawn’ emerges with his assertion of the primacy of the early Greek moment to ‘Western history’, but also with his own retrieval of the topology of *aletheia*, of the ‘visible and the invisible’, of the concealed and the Open amidst the event of thought and being. Heidegger is concerned with the ‘West’, the dawn of the West and the beckoning death of the West in the figures of the early Greeks, Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides. Heidegger – apart from his several cryptic references to Hegel – does not tell us ‘why’ the notion or motif of the ‘West’ is the proper horizon for our interpretation, though, we will attempt to divine such ‘reasons’, even if they strike us as surprisingly. Nor does he discuss the implications of his thought with respect to the historical divide between East and West, between the Oriental and the Occidental. Such considerations – to which we will return in his radical criticisms of Nietzsche’s ‘anthropology’ and ‘modernism’ – are put out of play for Heidegger. Philosophy (and let us assume that this means *thought* in this context) does not arise out of ‘mythology’, but ‘authentic’ thought is a saying, a *logos*, of the *Muthos*, of the myth as the Primordial Word.

Equally mysterious is Heidegger’s blunt insistence upon Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides as the only primordial thinkers. How can this be that case in light of the incipient and intense relationship of Hölderlin with Empedocles, a figure who was not only significant for Nietzsche (who does not even deal with Empedocles in his *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*), but also, for Heidegger in light of his own engagement with poet-philosopher. Of course, we must attempt to understand Heidegger before we seek to criticise his thinking upon the Greeks. Nevertheless, we must be wary of his meta-philosophical schematism of ‘Western’ philosophy and civilization, as he, as with the rest of the interpreters of early Greek thought, run the risk – or have already crossed the Rubicon – of the fatal flaw and



fallacy of *anachronism*. For even if Heidegger interprets the early Greeks as 'primordial', as opposed to 'primitive', he is still in agreement with the rest of the interpreters in two regards. On the one hand, the Greeks are privileged, they are 'originary'; on the other hand, their emergence as a cultural-political-linguistic 'unity' constituted a break with its own context of emergence – indeed, as the negation of its own context of emergence – this is why the Greeks are always children, are eternal . . . they are the beginning of a 'self-propelling wheel'. The details of the story are secondary to the assertion of primordial categories of differentiation, of joining and separation, of 'identity and difference'.

Heidegger asserts that the 'dawn' occurs with the apprehension by the primordial thinkers of archaic Greece of Being as *aletheia*, an event that was that of an anti-mythological Muthos – which is one way to interpret Heidegger, and in this light, he would have strange bedfellows in light of the motif of the dawn. For Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine – as necessitated by the 'logic' of our own meta-narrative – the dawn can be nothing other than a reflection upon themselves, as they bask in the self-assured realisation of their own merely theoretical triumph over their 'primitive' precursors.

For the modernists and the scientists, the dawn is that of criticism (Patôcka) and experimentation (Bacon, Hawkings), of the 'Enlightenment' (Adorno and Horkheimer), of the world with critical reason (Popper, Habermas, Adorno); the 'elimination of metaphysics' through the logical (Carnap) and mathematical (Godel, Badiou) analysis of language (Wittgenstein), world (Heidegger) and Reality (Jacques Lacan); the Good as the first, the ethical as first philosophy (Plato, Levinas, Critchley). Hannah Arendt, in keeping with these various alibis for the 'dawn', stated in her *Life of the Mind*<sup>13</sup> that the Greeks were exceptional in that they devised an abstract alphabet that was alone capable of 'objectivity', transcendence from the facticity of existence. Such a capacity stands in contrast to the alphabet/culture of the Egyptians (or the Chinese), for instance, who remained 'at the level' of mere pictographic or sensuous alphabets (although this is a clear misinterpretation as the Egyptian alphabet is alphabetic in the Greek sense and is not merely pictographic).

Each of these interpretations of the 'dawn', with respect to the meaning of the early Greeks, suffer from the fatal error of anachronism, one which supplies these precursors with a meaning, a significance which perhaps has little – or nothing – to do with 'their' own indigenous context of emergence. Indeed, as I have suggested concerning the mythical narrative of Eden and the authorship of Abraham, not only are the various

‘interpretations’, pictures of the early ‘Greeks’ anachronistic, but they are also merely redactions of the ‘origin’ – meta-philosophical in character and intention – which serve as the authorial pedigree of the legitimacy of contemporary (whatever *con-tempus* that may be) practices and their associated, though essentially arbitrary ideologies.

All the same, we are prone to tell stories, and as with Kant’s creative reason in his Transcendental Philosophy, we inexorably seek a ‘higher unity’ in our quest to answer unanswerable, though unavoidable, questions. But, none of these meta-positions are either determinative or normative with respect to our desire to understand early ‘Greek’ thinking in light of its own context of emergence and, thus, in the sense and meaning of its own radical or indigenous expression. Such a cautiously optimistic opening is encouraged by the work of post-structuralists, such as Bataille, Derrida and Krell, as we will see in Chapter 5, who offer insights into (or with serious repercussions for) early ‘Greek’ thought which allow us to forego the ‘anachronistic’ and ‘ideological’ interpretations of the ‘Dawn’ as a ‘beginning’, as a ‘mystical foundation of authority’ which hides its ‘origin’ of violence in the repetitive trauma of its own incessant and cybernetic re-enactment – that which, ‘what’ we call ‘civilization’. For our investigation of early ‘Greek’ thinking must simultaneously be a radical exploration of ourselves as we live and affirm – perhaps resist – our own questionable ‘identity’, ‘identification’ in, amid the meta-narrative of the ‘origin’, whether that is with the ‘Greeks’ or, some other primordial nexus. In ‘our’ persistent case, it is our tainted desire for ‘presence’ and the ritual enactment of the metaphysics thereof, which is the mode of operation of the factual, existential repetition of the ‘logic’ of the fundamental *apartheid* – the ‘severance’ – of the ‘land of evening’ from the *other*.

## Chapter 2

# The Dance of Being: Contexts of Emergence and Mytho–Poetic Horizons

The Goddess tells Parmenides that **nothing** emerges from *nothing*, though in our necessary, everyday discourse, we speak as though the ‘nothing’ were an intimate friend. Why does the Goddess tell him this, but – at the same time – also instruct him that the questionable way of mortal knowing is also necessary for him? Why is the ‘nothing’ forbidden from the outset, cast far from the ‘origin’?

The ‘first’ question that we must ask is: ‘How do we approach the early Greek philosophers, early Greek thought, without erasing that which we seek?’

Of course, our ‘first’ answer is philological, scholastic. ‘We’ must consult all the ‘sources’: all of the extant texts, doxographical evidence of oral teachings and referenced works that have not survived later philosophical and historical testimony (Plato, Aristotle, neo-platonism, etc.), and indeed, of the mytho–poetic horizons of a *context of emergence* – if we wish to be truly ‘philosophical’.

Yet, can we simply read these sources as such, naively, to gain an understanding of early Greek philosophy? For while the early ‘Greeks’ are said to be the ‘first’ to speak of ‘philosophy’, this later term has undergone significant transformations throughout ‘our’ so-called ‘history’. It would seem problematic to simply and retrospectively project our own meanings onto the archaic philosophers.

In order to approach the early philosophers, ‘we’ must become aware of ‘our’ own philosophical presuppositions, which may stand in the way of a *hermeneutics* of the early philosophers. How does our philosophical starting point effect our interpretation of these thinkers?

The sources and contextual horizons of early philosophy are vital. But, what of larger, deeper, horizons still? As I have suggested, it is ‘generally’ held (in the West and probably the ‘East’, as well, although these distinctions lost their relevance long ago . . . ) that the ‘pre-Socratics’ are the *first*

philosophers. But, is this indeed the case? What is philosophy? Is it the point of transition from 'myth' to 'science', as held by dominant 'Western' philosophers from both the Analytic and Continental traditions?

As I have suggested in the previous chapter, there is a danger and the already evident crime – as I have exposed – of *anachronism* in the wide array of interpretations, common to nearly all Western philosophy and thought with respect to archaic philosophy.

*Anachronism* (a fatal charge) is the practise of imposing interpretive criteria from later (or non-compatible) historical periods. For instance, the judgement of the logical positivists that the essence of philosophy is scientific had been used by Francis Cornford and Bertrand Russell to literally cut Pythagorean philosophy into two, the scientific and the mystical, and giving value to only the former dimension. The problem of anachronism is also apparent in the judgements upon and by the philosophers Plato and Aristotle.

We must attempt to instead articulate, cultivate and disseminate a different reading, one which intimates an indigenous understanding of archaic philosophy through a disclosure of its own *context of emergence*. As we can fathom from its contemporary practice from Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer,<sup>1</sup> to John Caputo,<sup>2</sup> I will argue, in the following pages, that it is a *radical hermeneutics* which is the method by which we can unfold the significance of a state of affairs that is context specific – of the archaic philosophers who emerged throughout Greece and its colonies in the Sixth Century. The question, again, is: how do we approach them, can we understand them at all, or, are we *forever* forced to capitulate to anachronism? Or will an exploration of the context of emergence for early philosophy provide us with a rigorous and clear method for the disclosure of the meaning of not only early Greek thought but also philosophy *as such*?

As we have seen with the various renditions of the *Muthos* of the Dawn, a serious question emerges for those who do not adequately contextualize the emergent phenomenon – can we legitimately assert that there was a break, an autonomous 'origin', emergence, of the discourse of philosophy, as a 'form of life' and 'linguistic community' in the sense of 'use' (Ludwig Wittgenstein) – without at least clearly and precisely delineating (in this scenario) even that *against which* the early Greeks may have emerged? Beyond the obvious question of such 'spontaneous' emergence in terms of its susceptibility to critical scrutiny, it would seem that, regardless of one's considered opinion, the context of emergence would need to be explored (and not simply caricatured in terms of the usual antinomies between myth and science or poetry and prose or between the irrational and rational). Perhaps, the most honest criticism of mythology comes, as with have

indicated, from Patôcka, when he equates mythology with ideology – over against ‘truth’ – he was tortured to death for this distinction. Should one die, however, for a truth in quotation marks?

It is, moreover, possible that with the very act of an adequate consideration of the context of emergence, it will become immediately clear that the various ideologies regarding the emergence and significance of early Greek – and more generally Greek philosophy – are not only exposed as inadequate interpretations of the phenomenon in question, but that they in fact actively serve to obfuscate not only our understanding of Greek thought, but also that of philosophy *itself*.

Indeed, it could easily be argued – and, I will laboriously undertake this argument in the following – that it is simply not possible to comprehend the significance of the early ‘Greek’ thinkers without a thorough exploration of its context of emergence. For, there was an emergence . . . but what is the character of this ‘novel’ phenomenon? What is specific about the ‘Greeks’, or, with Nietzsche, of what is it a symptom? What is this ‘form of life’, language ‘game’, and what are the features and aspects of its context of emergence?

## The Context of Emergence: Introduction

We need to work to be open to the hermeneutic context of emergence for the early philosophers, thinkers, poets and artists – to the texture of archaic culture as it emerged from many ‘origins’, not only from the indigenous ‘Dark Ages’, following the collapse of Mycenaen civilization, but also, amid the wider Mediterranean *topos* in a belated recognition of its primal status as a epochal *lifeworld*. From this perspective, we must trace out the genealogy of the ‘dialogue’ between Mesopotamian, Babylonian (expressed in the code word ‘Orphic) and African mythologies<sup>3</sup> (not to mention mathematics and astronomy), and indigenous ‘Greek’ mytho-poetics.

This ‘dialogue’ becomes rather complex, when considered from the perspective of contemporary linguistic and archaeological research, as portrayed for instance in the work of Walter Burkert (1998), Charles Penglase (1997), and Nanno Marinatos (2000). It is in this way that our first task will be to lay out a ‘rough sketch’ of the context of emergence for early Greek thought – of the ‘philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks’. As we will see, Nietzsche’s errant intimation here will become quite significant, as Heidegger will concur, in disclosing the character of early Greek thought in terms of its status as a unique historical phenomenon. I will to this end turn

first to recent researches into the mytho-poetic influences not only upon 'Greece' considered a discrete, identifiable cultural matrix, but also those which were formative in the very constitution of 'Greek' poetics and mythology, as these themselves arose and lived prior to the existence (*Dasein*) of Greece in its Mycenaen precursors.

The Greeks are flowers  
of a different world.  
We pick them and put them  
in a vase upon our mantelpiece.  
The flowers soon die –  
They are not ours,  
We took them –  
as with the Elgin Marbles –  
this water we give them is nothing,  
no substitute for their own root  
of life, existence and being.

Bryon, who died in Greece, not for a mere Idyll, but *amid* a revolution, says it better:

'Mortal!' – 'twas thus she spake – 'that blush of shame  
Proclaims thee Briton, once a noble name;  
First of the mighty, foremost of the free,  
Now honour'd less by all, and least by me;  
Chief of thy foes shall Pallas still be found.  
Seek'st thou the cause of loathing? – look around.  
Lo! here, despite of war and wasting fire,  
I saw successive tyrannies expire.  
'Scaped from the ravage of the Turk and Goth,  
Thy country sends a spoiler worse than both.  
Survey this vacant, violated fane;  
Recount the relics torn that yet remain:  
These Cecrops placed, this Pericles adorn'd,  
That Adrian rear'd when drooping Science mourn'd.  
What more I owe let gratitude attest-  
Know, Alaric and Elgin did the rest.  
That all may learn from whence the plunderer came,  
The insulted wall sustains his hated name.  
From 'The Curse of Minerva' by Lord Byron, 1811<sup>4</sup>

Also:

Cold is the heart, fair Greece, that looks on thee,  
 Nor feels as lovers o'er the dust they loved;  
 Dull is the eye that will not weep to see  
 Thy walls defaced, thy mouldering shrines removed  
 By British hands, which it had best behov'd  
 To guard those relics ne'er to be restored.  
 Curst be the hour when their isle they roved,  
 And once again thy hapless bosom gored,  
 And snatch'd thy shrinking Gods to northern climes abhorr'd!  
 Canto XV, 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage', by Lord Byron, 1812<sup>5</sup>

### Burkert, Penglase, and Marinatos – The Meta-horizon of the Context of Emergence

As we have noted in our consideration of the motif of the Dawn, there has persisted a widespread and uncritical repetition of the notion that the 'Greeks' – however we are to define this phenomenon – constitute the 'beginning' or *arche* of Western civilization and history. And, while there may be some intrinsic sense in which this may be the case, such a contention has served not only to erect barriers between the 'West' and the 'others', it has also served to render nearly unintelligible the genuine significance of early Greek thought, and thus of the 'founding event' of cultural and intellectual patterns of Western civilization itself. At the same time, however, there has been some indication that early Greek thought did not simply come into existence in a vacuum.

Kirk and others, for instance, in their *The Presocratic Philosophers*, set forth an opening chapter, entitled 'The Forerunners of Philosophical Cosmogony', in which there is laid out very brief schematic analyses of Homer, Hesiod and 'Orphicism' in regards to their various contributions to cosmogony. While such a chapter is welcomed on a provisional level, the chapter betrays itself and its purpose with the title of its final section, 'Toward Philosophy'. In other words, the chapter serves to re-instantiate the dominant mythology concerning the 'dawn' of philosophy, and the meaning and significance, once again, of not only the 'Greek moment', but also with regards to the meaning of philosophy itself. Why, for instance, is Hesiod not considered to be a philosopher? On the contrary, is it not possible that there exists a continuity of intellectual and mytho-poetic structures and motifs

between the likes of Hesiod and Thales, for instance? However, beyond this question as to the status of Hesiod with respect to philosophy (and, thus, the question of the very meaning of philosophy), there is the hermeneutical question of our ability to interpret the meaning and significance of early Greek thinkers – without the unstated assumption of a linguistically dynamic and mytho-poetically diverse *lifeworld* in which these narratives and the conflicts thereof, both historical and geographico-cultural are embedded, or dwell, as with Heidegger's later intimation of 'language as the house of Being', of language as a dwelling for the mindfulness of a culture-intellectual epoch. Of course, it may be suggested – as an *apologia* – that Kirk and others are writing in a different era and that their own 'beginning' with the 'forerunners' was a radical gesture. Moreover, it could also be pointed out that the usual story is ever steadily changing, as evidenced by the recent work of James Warren, *Presocratics*<sup>6</sup>, in which a much more robust consideration, for instance, of Hesiod is offered as a background horizon for the emergence of *philosophia* proper. Nevertheless, despite such 'progress', Warren stays well within the fold of the dominant Western interpretations of early Greek thought, not only in his repetition of the awkward 'Pre' in 'Presocratics', but also with his capitulation to Aristotle that Thales is to be considered the 'first' philosopher. The immediate consequences of this unfortunate hesitation are the mere repetition of the polemical motifs of not only the 'philosophical' criticism of mythology, but also, of the concomitant ontological projection of the early Greek thinkers as physicists, materialists. In this way, despite the interesting point of departure in his work, Warren eventually gives us a routine and rather commonplace survey of each dominant 'pre-socratic' thinker without any exploration, excavation of an underlying matrix of *hidden* (Heraclitus) inter-connections between these various statements of philosophical truth – there is no 'conversation'; again, the chorus is annulled. We may unearth this 'tragic' matrix through a radical consideration of the context of emergence in its exhaustive horizons and with regards to the conflicts and continuities between mytho-poetic horizons and motifs – as explored by Nietzsche, for instance, in his *The Birth of Tragedy* – a 'terrain of opposition' and 'diffusion' which *originarily* cleared the historical space for the emergence of a 'grand style', the place, of a novel culture, a 'form of life', which, in our current context, is the 'tragic age of the Greeks', exemplified by *tragic* poetry and early Greek thought.

Hippocrates, in his medical writings, begins his meditations upon 'disease' with the claim that one needs to know the context, the land and climate, of a people in order to know its diseases. As Krell explores in many of his works, dis-ease seems to have a persistent link to specific contexts, as if



there is a strange *symbiosis* between various diseases and typical or perhaps a-typical ‘forms of life’. Not to say that thought is a disease – but we must recall Heidegger’s indication of the primordially of mood, and, specifically, that of the ‘strife’ of anxiety, as the dispositional (*Befindlichkeit*) context of emergence for *eigentlich* (actual) self-hood. Anxiety – *his* context of emergence – is the dis-ease of the *breach* which originarily calls the primal thought of being to awaken for him from his withdrawal amid the routine intercourse with (*bei*) beings. Heidegger develops this indication of the ‘breach’ with his emphasis upon the transfiguration enacted by the event of the work of art after his *Kehre* or ‘turn’ which took place in his thought with the *metontology* of the 1930s. Although we will return to this thematic in Chapter 4, ‘Aletheia and Being: Heidegger *contra* Nietzsche’, suffice it to say for now that, in a manner consistent with Nietzsche’s own interpretation of early ‘Greek’ culture, it is the *work of art* which, in its event and duration (an intimation of Henri Bergson), discloses that which is *there* – that an ‘ontical’ work of *poiesis*, in the moment, acts as the *honest* exemplar for the epoch itself.

The invitation to a *metontology* of art, to the configurations and gestures, rhythms of life, the texture of the ‘world’ brings about its own ‘anxiety’. We seek to hide, to flee from the abyss of our own alleged ‘origin’ with the pat answers of unthinking, obedient rhetoric – a vague inculcation of dismissal and stereotype, of gossip. This is our ‘intellectual pride’ – (Imam Sayyed Khomeini<sup>7</sup>) – but a pride that is based neither on achievement, nor insight, but upon denials, exclusions, and exterminations. With ‘abjection’ (Julia Kristeva), we retreat into a docile echo chamber of repetition and thoughtlessness. It could be possible that the result of our explorations could lead us to the *tragic insight* that our own ‘identity’ is nothing but grains of sand through our fingers. We ‘create’ (constitute and regulate) ourselves in opposition to the ‘abyss’, never thinking to look into the abyss or to allow the *abyss* to look into ourselves.

The abyss of *metontology* inhabits the *topos* of temporal eruptions – of ‘systems and breaks’, of ‘broken hegemonies’ (Schürmann), this intimate historicity of ‘ourselves’ and the ‘others’. If we are to comprehend the early ‘Greeks’, we must look into *this* abyss – but also, we must invite this ‘groundless’ to reflect back upon ‘ourselves’ as mortal, finite interpreters, embedded within ‘our own’ epochal *historicality*. This question of context must operate, at the very least, on two levels, first, these imminent contextual and existential dynamics of the ‘tragic sixth century’, second, the meta-horizontal, *philosophical* question, with regards to the basic ‘integrity’ of the very notion of ‘Greek’ *mythology* in light of its ‘lowly origins’.

What is 'Greek' about the 'Greeks'?

Nietzsche sees sixth-century Greece under the aspect of the 'tragic'. Such a 'vision' may, in the end, be that which 'typifies' the 'Greeks'.

Burkert (and his followers, Penglase and Marinatos) portrays the transfiguration of archaic 'Greece' in the sixth century, however, as an 'orientalizing revolution in Greek art'.

Nietzsche never mentions it, and certainly not Heidegger. Such a phrase may be more attuned with Bataille, Derrida and Krell (but, not incompatible with Nietzsche or Heidegger).

Nevertheless, before we delve into the 'context of emergence' for sixth-century tragic poetry, or, in other words, into the first question – our 'immediate' question – and, one which directly pertains to our explorations of Nietzsche and Heidegger in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, we must consider the deeper context for the emergence of 'Greek' mythology and art in the first place – a historical place, traceable era, or, epoch of the radical geography, of the *topos*, of a specific 'culture' and 'civilization'.

Penglase, in his work *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia*, lays out in detail the meta-horizonal *topos* for the emergence the *Greek child*. Greece is a 'child' as it was born amid the topography and historicity of the ancient Mediterranean world, of the successive 'centre', which lay in Sumeria, Mesopotamia and, later, Babylon and Assyria.

We have explored the question of the meaning of the 'child', the 'beginning', of the 'dawn'. We are not the 'first' to ask these questions.

Yet, it is our precise answer to 'these questions' which will disclose *who we are*.

The work of Penglase shows quite clearly that 'Greece', as with each utterance, trace of language, as Heidegger suggests in his *Parmenides*, is *translation* amid originary self-expression, of appropriative translations of Mesopotamian and Babylonian 'science' and 'art' – of the mytho-poetic 'structures', which disseminate not merely the linguistic and philological determination of 'words' and the order of words, but as a *performative* and *indicative* nexus of 'ways of being' and 'ways of discourse'. Penglase is not blind, however, to the philological, linguistic and archaeological work that is necessary for an explication of a culture or of the possible influences, and his work abounds with such considerations and with a detailed criteria for the establishment of credible influence between cultures and temporal epochs. At the same time, such criteria only serve to establish the likelihood of contiguity, of contact between, for instance, Mesopotamian mythological cycles and Greek mytho-poetic expression – indeed, in two notional cultures which were historically separated, in respect of their primes, by more

than a millennium. The story which Penglase tells is that of 'unity in difference', of continuity, translation, adaption and original creative contribution. Nevertheless, perhaps what is most compelling in his account, and which is most directly related to our current project of understanding early Greek thought, is the topography of resemblance and repetition which he discloses between Mesopotamian, Babylonian and Greek mytho-poetics on the level of the structural aspects, configurations, motifs and even the basics of plotlines between the narratives. There are myriad translations – whether in regards to recurrent 'structural' aspects or typical strands of narrative, such as that of the 'heroic' strand, in which the hero is first defined in terms of his action, or that of the 'goddess and consort', which not only accounts for the births of heroes, but also, their propagation of their cult throughout the homeland – or again, the *motifs* of light, the snake or the underworld, in the echoes of stories about the great fight against the Typhon, the monster Apsu. All of these point not only to the historicity of narrative continuity and diffusion, but also, in light of our *ontological differentiation* of 'ways of being' and 'ways of discourse', to a continuity of being, and ways of being, amid what could be regarded as a longstanding Mediterranean lifeworld. Marinatos augments moreover the interpretations of Burkert and Penglase through her own focus upon the iconographic artefacts which disseminate, beyond the *topos* of mythological poetics (*saying*), the exemplary illustrations (*showing*) of the Naked Goddess and Mistress of Animals, that Near Eastern archetype of the dangerous, seductive Goddess. Penglase and Marinatos are among the generation to come of age in the wake of the penetrating work of Walter Burkert, a voice who figures prominently in the transformation of our image of Greece and of its relationship to its contemporaries and its predecessors, who it must be remembered, did not merely disappear but were translated into the centres of novel cultural and political prominence, even in their own eclipse from prominence.

It should be remembered that Burkert was well aware of the suspicion that was cast upon his novel perspectives and arguments regarding the archaic world, and it should also be mentioned that he must have allowed his own 'good fight' against the 'conservatism' of the academic culture of his period to influence his own strategy of narration and exposition. In other words, there are certain names, for instance, that Burkert does not mention. Indeed, the same can be said of Penglase and Marinatos – and, perhaps, most of the 'reputable' scholars of the Archaic and Classical 'worlds'. At the same time, from the philosophical perspective of these names, the work of Penglase, Burkert and Marinatos, has become interesting, and, in some cases, crucial for the elaboration of a philosophical

hermeneutics of the archaic world. Of course, Burkert and Penglase make reference to philosophers, but mostly, to 'Classical' philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, and, in some cases, to Pythagoras. But such references, often mentioned uncritically and without further comment, do not, if we honestly assess what Burkert, Penglase and their like are actually doing – facilitate their own projects, the trajectories of which move in a manner that is in conflict with the Classical interpretation of the Archaic world. They have both resisted – with the others – to be taxonomized by the categories of philosophy. To a significant extent, this *subversive* strategy has been successful, and Burkert has increasingly become the standard reading for this historical period. Moreover, such a reading has been a call to those, like Penglase and Marinatos, who would seek to disclose – with the least possibility of doubt – the existential and narrative 'continuity' of the archaic *lifeworld*.

Nevertheless, it should be admitted that there were 'grounds' to the suspicions against Burkert. Perhaps, the 'grounds' are precisely and rigorously a correlate of Burkert's seeming lack of *grounds*. The suspicion is that Burkert is not telling us the whole story, or at least that part which includes the 'self-questioning of the questioner'. Is Burkert merely fulfilling the typology of the scholar with his will-to-truth? Or, is his narrative configured with respect to a background of a specific meditation upon history – indeed, upon a philosophy of history, or in association with a particular comportment toward and with historicity and history?

There would be no question – or suspicion – concerning Burkert if there were no resonance of his work – that explodes from his pages – with that of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille, Foucault and others. Perhaps the most usual suspect would be Nietzsche – who Burkert consistently fails to mention in his works. Penglase, Marinatos, Warren, etc . . . none of these writers mention any of these forbidden names. At the same time, many of the novel perspectives of Burkert can only be seen as mere echoes of Nietzsche in his writings upon the Greeks. The philosophy of Heidegger – of which Burkert must have been aware, not to mention the work of the 'French' tradition – finds no quarter in Burkert's 'world' and it may be argued that his status as a classics scholar has perhaps kept him from honestly articulating the diverse philosophical horizon amid which he is working, for he is still alive at the time of this writing. Yet – I will be interrupted – a good classics scholar should not articulate a philosophy, but should report the 'facts'. This exaggerated quip is meant to indicate a divide between 'classics' and 'philosophy', not merely as 'disciplines' or as 'academic subjects', but as ways of comportment with the 'thing itself'. Burkert outlined what was basically

a programme of archaic anthropology which was consonant with a terrain of philosophical work, but could not, due to the strictures of the 'classical canon' – make any reference to those who were, perhaps, his greatest philosophical allies – not even to speak of or even suggest of any influence. 'Classics' becomes impoverished through its *perverse* philological resistance to 'philosophy', the character of which is thought. At the same time, philosophy is diminished not only by its lack of direct interface with the pertinent horizons of the archaic world, but also through its distance from the fertile texts of history that have, until recently, been the preserve only of Classicists. But, is it the fault of 'classicists' that 'contemporary' philosophy always returns to the question of the modern subject – and merely regurgitates a gruel of 'gossip' when asked about the early Greeks?

We make gestures to the 'Greeks',  
but only parrot stereotypes  
we no longer *know* anything  
*that does not seem to be who we are . . .*<sup>8</sup>

To reconnect with the question of the 'beginning' – and, to the abyss, to the 'other' of the 'beginning' – to look upon a poem, artwork, or any being in the world – *philosophically* – is to seek to apprehend its *truth* – that which is disclosed, concealed through a 'sign', which intimately 'speaks', *says*, and 'points', *shows* – *that which is the case* across a topography of lattice-relations of a *lifeworld*. Or, perhaps, there is a sense that the 'artefacts' of our culture, like those of early Greek thought (which has for *the time being* remains free from 'Classics') are vitally important to our most significant and intimate questions. Amid the museum-ing of a 'specimen', dead like a 'Natural History Museum', which is our current life, we are free to explore – to think – to investigate, contemplate, meditate, in the manner that is appropriate to our own 'perspective' upon a *vague* phenomenon that remains inexplicably extant, though 'it' continues to erupt in the *around world* or *world around* (*Umwelt*), or, as the *lifeblood* or provocations for our thought.

With Penglase, we witness the broad horizons of our current existence as *translations*, creative appropriations of primordial narratives. With Burkert, we move to the horizon of our current question, that of early Greek thought. We already know that Greek *mythos* is traced to preceding, or differing, cultures, although it enacted its own creative appropriation. When was that, by the way? Between Hesiod, a philosopher of *Works and Days*, and the *Mythiker* Aeschylus, the artist of revolutionary tragedy, himself a disciple of Pythagoras? Or, previous to these? Penglase suggests multiple, cultural and historical

(temporal) diffusions, consistent with Burkert. Yet, our question is the 'birth of philosophy' or, in its 'innocence', early Greek thought. Such a question transcends Burkert and Penglase, etc. Not that they are 'useless' or 'dispensable' for our purposes, but, they have never raised – but *avoided* – the question.

Burkert, in his *The Orientalizing Revolution*, speaks, of sixth-century Greek art in terms of an 'orientalising influence' which exhibited the power to transform 'Greek' culture. What is interesting about this short work is not its general account, which is reasonable, but its lack of reference to Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* – or, to any other *philosophically* relevant text. Indeed, it would seem to be simple to connect the notion of sixth-century 'orientalization' with Nietzsche's meditations on the tragic age and the birth of Greek tragedy.

Nevertheless, he does not. We must, in this way, without of course 're-inventing the wheel', enact our own philosophical investigations of archaic thought as it is expressed in the mytho-poetic horizons of the Greek literature and philosophy of the 'tragic age'. But, there is a different point to be made. Not only is there a 'context' – that is clear always, even if there are those who ceaselessly evade the 'whole' – but there is also a specific interaction of these constituents of the 'whole', of the relation between the *en* and the *pantos*, and of the *pseudos*, the false, spurious interpretations, the evasive accounts. It is this interaction that discloses the specific character of early Greek thought. The character is that of sublimated conflict, 'unity of opposites', articulated, not only through meta-horizonal narratives, such as Penglase, but also, in the specific genealogy of the *context of emergence*, as traced by Burkert (though not thematized), amid the immediate mytho-poetic horizons and thought patterns.

Before we turn to specific attempts to characterise the context of emergence for early Greek thought – from the perspectives of Nietzsche (Chapter 3), Heidegger (Chapter 4), and of post-structuralism (Chapter 5) – we must review the various cultural and aesthetic powers and mythological tapestries which served as the narrative texture and mytho-poetic horizons of the context of emergence. It is such a context which provides a hermeneutical orientation for the surfacing of a community of *noetic-biotic* practise, typical of 'early Greek thought' in the 'tragic' sixth century, the century of Burkert's 'orientalizing revolution'. Of course, there will and can be no claim that such a topography is exhaustive. On the contrary, our 'list' should be regarded as indicative of an attempt to set out the configuration of a context of emergence which casts into relief a coherent, plausible account of the incipient phenomenon of early Greek thought, and one which resists

the drift into facile ‘anachronism’ which seems to dominate most of the hegemonic narratives of the *dawn* of ‘Western’ thought. Moreover, while the list is laid out chronologically, this is not meant to confer the sense of a successionist, linear ‘history’ or any notion that each of the thematized influences, or threads, had displaced or had overcome the preceding thread. Many of these threads persisted – and persist – as living traditions, narratives, well into historical times. Yet, in the ‘period’ we are considering, each of these influences were active as threads within the context of emergence. That which will be decisive, of course, will be the precise *morphe* of the interaction of these strands in the interweaving of a context, as most radically typified in Nietzsche’s excavation of the emergence of Attic Tragedy and ‘philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks’. In this way, a brief survey will set out some of the material for our discussion in our investigation of attempts at non-anachronistic interpretations of archaic thought.

### The Pelasgian Creation Myth

Adapted from Robert Graves’ *The Greek Myths* by Dr. James Luchte

In the beginning, Eurynome,  
 The Goddess of All Things,  
 Rose naked from Chaos.  
 She found nothing upon  
 Which to rest her feet, and thus,  
 She divided the sea from the sky.  
 She danced lonely upon  
 The waves of the sea.  
 She danced towards the South, and  
 The Wind set in motion behind her  
 Seemed something new and strange  
 With which to begin a work of creation.  
 Wheeling about, she caught hold of  
 This North wind, rubbed it between  
 Her hands, and behold!  
 The great serpent Ophion.  
 Eurynome danced to warm herself, wildly  
 And more wildly, until Ophion, enchanted,  
 Coiled about her divine limbs  
 Becoming one with her.

As she lay with the Ophion,  
Eurynome was got with child.  
Eurynome assumed the form of a dove,  
Brooding upon the waves and with time,  
She laid the Universal Egg.  
At her bidding, Ophion coiled seven times  
About this egg, until it hatched and split into two.  
Out tumbled all things that exist, her children:  
Sun, moon, planets, stars, Earth with her mountains  
Rivers, trees, herbs, and all living creatures.  
Eurynome and Ophion made their home upon  
Mount Olympus where he vexed her by  
Claiming to be the author of the Universe.  
Forthwith, she bruised his head with her heel,  
Kicked out his teeth, and banished him to the  
Dark caves below the Earth.  
Eurynome opened her gaze and her arms to her  
Children, giving each its name which she read  
Off its own singular power and being.  
She named the sun, moon, planets, stars and  
The Earth with her mountains and rivers, trees,  
Herbs and living creatures.  
She took joy in her creation, but soon found  
Herself alone desiring the face, voice,  
ear and warmth of another of her own.  
Eurynome stood up and once again  
Began to dance alone upon the waves.<sup>9</sup>

This myth is older than Homer and Hesiod, and with its reference to the 'Universal Egg', it could be regarded as a source for *Orphic* myth-poetics. There are also clear resonances with Hesiod's *Theogony* with their shared thematic of a 'primordial chaos' and with mythological motifs in Homer, most obviously in the agonistic character of the alchemical marriage of the primal goddess and god, as Eurynome and Ophion, who exhibit a marked resemblance with Hera and Zeus. In this way, as we have argued, this would be another instance in which that which is 'Greek in the Greeks' can be traced to an earlier cultures or contexts, in this case from the supposed inhabitants of the Peloponnese, prior to that which later came to be known as the Hellenes, or to the 'Greeks'. This myth exhibits significant similarities with other myths, such as the creation story in *Genesis* (with respect to



the location, characters, trajectory of the myth, but suggests a reversal of the power and fate of the characters with respect to gender. Such a reversal perhaps intimates the shift from matriarchy to patriarchy, which, it is argued, took place in this era).

From a hermeneutical perspective, we may regard this myth as having arisen from the desire to understand, *gloss* our existence – or, to give a specific account thereof, and one with specific ‘implications’. This ‘myth’ presupposes – as the deep structure of its articulation – the idea that the other, the snake, is created by the Goddess to impregnate herself, as it is summoned from the winds that are stirred by her own dancing. There is no separation of ‘realms’, but only the differentiation of *aspects* from out of a primordial ‘first’ or All.

Hermeneutics is not, of course, meant to be an adjunct of ‘scientific realism’, one in its lack of imagination, would question whether or not the ‘Egg’ exists, or would question other features of the myth. Such a scientific method is not attuned to an investigation of myth as a poetic and symbolist document. Mytho-poetic thought must have its own ‘methods’, distinct from ‘religion’ and ‘science’ and must have its own capacity for judgement that can establish ‘truth’. In this light, our concern with mytho-poetic narrative is an attempt to transcend ‘religious’ and ‘scientific’ interpretations of myth, for example, the creation of the world in seven days, or the myth as a ‘primitive’ substitute for science. We must be vigilant in light of the many attempts to *put us to sleep* with variations of ‘literalist fundamentalism’, that of not only the ‘facts of science’ and its unacknowledged, ‘metaphysical’ presuppositions, but also the fundamentalism of ‘faith’ which gives us no resource for philosophical questioning.

For the early Greeks, as Heidegger has argued (and which we will explore in detail in Chapter 4), truth is not concerned with ‘facts’ or with their coordination with ‘states of affairs’, but with *Aletheia*, of the place and event amid which ‘truth’ is brought out of concealment into the Open, just as Eurynome and all things emerge into the light from Chaos. Such a notion of truth is given a further dimension in light of the mytho-poetic motif of the river Lethe (Hegel’s favourite), the river of forgetfulness, from which the dead drink as he or she enters Hades. *Aletheia* has, thus, the further connotation of ‘remembrance’.

What is truth? Are there many different ‘forms’ of ‘truth’, or, many different ways to disclose the truth, to let that which is the case stand out into the light? For instance, the fable of ‘Adam and Eve’ in *Genesis* can be regarded as a mytho-poetic expression of ‘truth’, but, to this very day, many consider it to be The Truth (although this may simply and perniciously be a misunderstanding of poetry and its conventions). It may be unclear if we will ever

find any definitive truth. Yet, in our pursuit, we can guard against basic errors so that we can at least attempt to find a sense of truth that is coherent and susceptible of innovation and life. One such error is the absolutization of the exoteric form of a story, and the enforcement of an 'official' reading, to the exclusion of its essential or esoteric meaning, or, of the practise or method that underlies the story. This is another sense of the word *Aletheia*.

## Orpheus

### **The Orphic Creation Myth**

Some say that all the gods and all living creatures originated from the stream of Oceanus, which girdles the world, and that Tethys was the mother of all his children.

But the Orphics say that the black-winged Night, a goddess of whom even Zeus stands in awe, was courted by the Wind and laid a silver egg in the womb of Darkness; and that Eros, whom some call Phanes, was hatched from this egg and set the Universe in motion. Eros was double sexed and golden-winged and, having four heads, sometimes roared like a bull or a lion, sometimes hissed like a serpent or bleated like a ram. Night, who named him Ericepanius and Phaethon Protogenus, lived in a cave with him displaying herself in triad: Night, Order, and Justice. Before this cave sat the inescapable mother Rhea, playing on a brazen drum and compelling man's attention to the oracle of the goddess. Phanes created earth, sky, sun, and moon but the triple-goddess ruled the universe, until her scepter was passed to Uranus.<sup>10</sup>

Another later, more intellectualised, version of the theogonical myth is as follows:

Originally there was Hydros (Water), he [Orpheus] says, and Mud, from which Ge (the Earth) solidified: he posits these two as first principles, water and earth . . . The one before the two [Thesis], however, he leaves unexpressed, his very silence being an intimation of its ineffable nature. The third principle after the two was engendered by these – Ge (Earth) and Hydros (Water), that is – and was a Serpent (Drakon) with extra heads growing upon it of a bull and a lion, and a god's countenance in the middle; it had wings upon its shoulders, and its name was Khronos (Unaging Time) and also Herakles. United with it was Ananke

(Inevitability, Compulsion), being of the same nature, or Adrastea, incorporeal, her arms extended throughout the universe and touching its extremities. I think this stands for the third principle, occupying the place of essence, only he [Orpheus] made it bisexual [as Phanes] to symbolize the universal generative cause. And I assume that the theology of the [Orphic] Rhapsodies discarded the two first principles (together with the one before the two, that was left unspoken) [i.e. the Orphics discarded the concepts of Thesis, Khronos and Ananke], and began from this third principle [Phanes] after the two, because this was the first that was expressible and acceptable to human ears. For this is the great Khronos (Unaging Time) that we found in it [the Rhapsodies], the father of Aither and Khaos. Indeed, in this theology too [the Hieronyman], this Khronos (Time), the serpent has offspring, three in number: moist Aither (Light) (I quote), unbounded Khaos (Air), and as a third, misty Erebus (Darkness) . . . Among these, he says, Khronos (Time) generated an egg – this tradition too making it generated by Khronos, and born ‘among’ these because it is from these that the third Intelligible triad is produced [Protogonos-Phanes]. What is this triad, then? The egg; the dyad of the two natures inside it (male and female), and the plurality of the various seeds between; and thirdly an incorporeal god with golden wings on his shoulders, bulls’ heads growing upon his flanks, and on his head a monstrous serpent, presenting the appearance of all kinds of animal forms . . . And the third god of the third triad this theology too celebrates as Protogonos (First-Born) [Phanes], and it calls him Zeus the order of all and of the whole world, wherefore he is also called Pan (All). So much this second genealogy supplies concerning the Intelligible principles.<sup>11</sup>

Orpheus is regarded as a pre-Homeric poet in our genealogy, but who must also be regarded as post-Homeric in terms of the influence and, sometimes ambiguous meaning or reference of the term ‘Orphicism’. To this extent, we can refer to the ‘cosmogonical forerunners’ of the early Greeks, as does Kirk and others, but also as contemporaries of the Pythagoreans, as suggested by Cornford in his 1920s writings on early Pythagorean philosophy. Cornford even goes so far as to specify and repudiate the alleged Orphic aspects of Pythagorean philosophy, such as the doctrine of transmigration, as being mystical, primitive (and hence, dispensable) elements of an otherwise ‘scientific’ philosophy. Indeed, over and above any attempt to determine and delineate a ‘historical’ Orpheus (whose own ‘existence’ can only be discernible through the mytho-poetic intimations of mystery and legend), it could also be argued that the ‘Orphic’ is a polite code word – in light of our own earlier indications of the Mediterranean context for the

emergence of the Greek 'child'. In this light, 'Orphicism' could be regarded (as it is in Nietzsche) as the gateway to the Near East – Sumer, Babylon, Assyria . . . (Penglase) – and, the sixth-century intensity of the Orphic movement as the rebirth of Dionysus and Orpheus amid the 'orientalizing of Greek Art' (Burkert). The tortured *mythos* which we just read testifies to the horizons of earthy Greek thought within its own context of emergence.

Orpheus and Dionysus can, in this light, be regarded as taxonomical symptoms for the encroachment from the Near East – but, perhaps, only an intimation of an epochal shift – as the Dionysian Dithyramb, for Nietzsche, erupted, indigenously, in Greece. Of course, it is being argued in the current context that indigenous eruption can only be comprehensible against the background context of emergence in archaic mythological poetics, not merely Greek, but also of the earlier (and more 'oriental') mythology of Babylon and Sumeria. As with the Goddess and Consort strand of Mesopotamian and Babylonian mythology, Orpheus is the symbol of sexuality, fertility and the netherworld in pagan *mythos*, of eternal recurrence – Dionysus, of these things, but also intoxication, music, poetry, rebirth and war.

In the myth laid out above, which will be extremely important for our understanding of the development of early, and indeed later, Greek thought (Plato), we can discern aspects of resemblance (in addition to an affinity with the Near East) with, as we have suggested, the pre-Hellenic 'Pelagian Myth'. It should also be noticed that with the Orphics, there are two primordial elements, Time and Necessity (and an unspeakable prior), both of which will be traced in early Greek philosophy – not only to Thales, but most significantly in the thought of Anaximander – and indeed, in contemporary continental philosophy, such as Heidegger and Krell.

## Musaeus

Musaeus, it is said, was a pre-Homeric follower and corrector of Orpheus, who reiterates the doctrine of transmigration which is also explicitly shared with the Pythagoreans (Fragment 5) but whose significance lies in his indication of the Hyades, who are the nurses (nymphs) of Dionysus (Fragment 18). As daughters of Atlas and half-sisters of the Pleiades, the Hyades have had an affinity with rainfall, mentioned from Homer to Ovid as an intimation of their weeping at the death of their brother, Hyas. To alleviate their sadness, they were set by Zeus into the sky as a constellation of stars. That which is significant, in our current context, is that Thales, who, according to Aristotle, is the first 'scientific' philosopher, mentions the Hyades in his extant fragments (Fragment 2). For, if we merely adopt the Aristotelian

schema with regards to the 'history of philosophy', we could regard this reference to the Hyades as an indication which pertains to astronomy and perhaps meteorology, and to the alleged 'scientific' pursuits in the anecdotes associated with Thales. But, many questions emerge with regard to this account in terms of the danger of anachronism. First, if Thales was indeed concerned with astronomy, did this pursuit have the same significance for him as it did for Aristotle? Second, could it be possible that mytho-poetics had a different significance for Thales, one that we may even, in our current era, deem religious, as for instance, in divination? Third, is not the entire effort to separate 'science' and 'religion', in this context, *anachronistic*, another variant of the motif of the 'dawn'? Fourth, is there any *evidence* to suggest that there may be a different way or context in which Thales may have understood the Hyades? And, finally, is there a manner in which such a different, strange, understanding of the Hyades could be compatible with a concern with the ceaseless eruption of *phusis* as the visible *Kosmos*?

It would seem that our attention should be directed to the fourth question as an answer to this question will be an answer to the rest. At the same time, we should remember that, of the four extant fragments of Thales, only three are considered to be authentic – although it is likely that the possible forgery, which mentions 'substance', could itself be re-interpreted with respect to a different context. It is such a different context which emerges in light of different information, of *evidence* which suggests different possibilities of meaning, different contexts – different *language games*, different *forms of life*. The evidence that falls through the cracks is the reference by Kirk and by Burkert that Thales was affiliated, in some indeterminate way, with Babylonian mythology. The reason such a 'fact' is mentioned is in light of the assertion of the primacy of the element 'Water' for Thales. Although we will explore Thales in detail below, this reference to Babylonian mythology is significant for our explication of the sense of a context of emergence for early Greek thought – and thus, of the meaning of the latter, and consequently, of the meaning and the practice of philosophy itself. The mytho-poetics of the Babylonians were focussed on 'Water' – as the World emerged from the primordial chaos of Ocean. This much we have gleaned from Kirk and Burkert. Yet, if we also have a further look at Musaeus and at the mythology of the Hyades, in connection to the fertility myths of Babylon, we are able to disclose a differing context of meaning for the reference of Thales. The Hyades, the nymphs of Dionysus (the god of death and rebirth) weep with the death of their brother, Hylas. We have all emerged from the primordial chaos of Oceanus, of water, but we become other than water in the circuit of life, earth, fire and air. Yet, with our death,

we return to the *primordial*, to water, symbolised by the tears of the Hyades. At the same time though, as with the rainfall – as it is the case with the newly born year which rises with the Spring – is the fertiliser of the earth (as with Aztec mythology and magical practise, for instance) which brings the world back to life in rebirth. The circle of *phusis* is renewed with the rain, as it was eulogised with tears – all emerges into the light from water and returns to water, to the primordial chaos, or, with Nietzsche, to the primordial One which is Dionysus, the god of ecstatic life, death and rebirth. We are reminded of the affiliation here with Orphicism, which, again, may be regarded as a code word for the Near East. As we will see in the next chapter, it is precisely this Orphic or Dionysian eruption in Greece – and the resistance thereto from the ‘Doric’ Apollonianism of Homer, which allowed for the emergence of Attic Tragedy and philosophy in the tragic age. Such a meditation could also be linked to the well-known tale that Thales, while gazing, as he walked, into the sky fell into a well – and the handmaidens around him laughed. Indeed, as the sky is itself Oceanus, it is clear that Thales, looking at the sky, at the primordial Water of Chaos, home of the nymphs, the Hyades, fell into a lesser body of water, into a well, reminded of his own mortality, his own tragic irony amid an existence of radical circulation and flux. The handmaidens, as a contrast to the Hyades, do not cry, but laugh. It could be suggested that, in this context, the tragedy reminds us that we are finite, we fall into the well – but we fall into the water, which also reminds us to the cyclical necessity of rebirth, to the comedy of the eternal recurrence of the same. The handmaidens laugh – are joyous – since they know that although Thales has in this instant fallen into the well, that he will re-emerge from the darkness into the light. Such a notion does indeed suggest a differing notion of science than ourselves – though the jury is still out on the tragic *meaning* of Aristotle. It would seem that the world itself is the circle of Being, the dance of Being in Becoming, and that our pursuits of the visible are at once a love of Being itself, indeed, a trust in the eternity of Being, of the eternal recurrence of the same.

## Homer

Homer lived before Hesiod, according to Xenophanes, who was critical of both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the *Theogony* with its rampant, erotic polytheology of the gods and goddesses.

At the same time, Homer and Hesiod have been regarded as two fountainheads of the Greek ‘dawn’ besides the Tragedians, and this criticism

by Xenophanes has been widely interpreted as a ‘break’ with the tradition itself – even as an incipient monotheism which is seen to leave behind the mytho-poetic epoch. While I will return below to the question of Xenophanes and his alleged break with the mytho-poetic tradition, in the following two sections, I will lay out an orientation, an indication by which we can regard Homer and Hesiod as mytho-poetic and mytho-noetic sources of and for early Greek thought – and indeed, for that of later traditions, including our own. In this light, I would like to intimate one core aspect of Homeric mytho-poetics with regard to the *primordality* of the motif of ‘blood’ (and of the *body* and *flesh*) in relation to the power and *ethos* of life. We will, in this light, turn to Homer’s *Odyssey*, Book 11, ‘A Gathering of Shades’, in which this core significance of ‘blood as life’ can be seen as an indicative motif for the *gestalt* of Homeric thought.

By night

Our ship ran onward toward the Ocean’s bourne,  
 the realm and region of the Men of Winter,  
 hidden in mist and cloud. Never the flaming  
 Eye of Helios lights on those men  
 at morning, when he climbs the sky of stars,  
 Nor in descending earthward out of heaven;  
 ruinous night being rove over those wretches.  
 We made the land, put ram and ewe ashore,  
 and took our way along the Ocean stream  
 to find the place foretold for us by Kirkê.  
 There Perimêdês and Eurýlokhos  
 pinioned the sacred beasts. With my drawn blade  
 I spaded up the votive pit, and poured  
 libations round it to the unnumbered dead:  
 sweet milk and honey, then sweet wine, and last  
 clear water; and I scattered barley down.  
 Then I addressed the blurred and breathless dead,  
 vowing to slaughter my best heifer for them  
 before she calved, at home in Ithaka,  
 and burn the choice bits on the altar fire;  
 as for Teirêsiás, I swore to sacrifice  
 A black lamb, handsomest of all our flock.  
 Thus to assuage the nations of the dead  
 I pledged these rites, then slashed the lamb and ewe,  
 letting their black blood stream into the wellpit.

Now the souls gathered, stirring out of Erebos,  
 brides and young men, and men grown old in pain,  
 and tender girls whose hearts were new to grief;  
 many were there, too, torn by brazen lanceheads,  
 battle-slain, bearing still their bloody gear.  
 from every side they came and sought the pit  
 with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear.  
 But presently I gave command to my officers  
 to flay those sheep the bronze cut down, and make  
 burnt offerings of flesh to the gods below –  
 to sovereign Death, to pale Persêphonê.  
 Meanwhile I crouched with my drawn sword to keep  
 The surging phantoms from the bloody pit  
 Till I should know the presence of Teirêsius.<sup>12</sup>

This passage gives us a picture of the *modalities* of the Homeric ‘world’. The *mise en scene* is that of a sacrifice, one that has been disclosed by Kirkê as necessary in light of the quest of Odysseus to return to Ithaka. He and his comrades had already been imprisoned by Kirkê in a delirium of Lotus for five years, though one that seemed, from the perspective of her divine dwelling, to last only a day (eternal ‘now’). From a wider perspective, it could be argued that one sacrifice had already been enacted, by the mother of Odysseus, as she walked into the sea (into Poseidon, against whom Odysseus had transgressed in his *hubris*). Her sacrifice is due to her love of her son and ‘daughter’, and is given in exchange for his freedom from Kirkê. A further sacrifice would be necessary so as to gain from Teirêsius the waterway back to Ithaka – in this case, the sacrifice of a ram and a ewe, upon the Isle of the Death. This *topography* of sacrifice – and of gift – is significant for our purposes on two levels. On the one hand, as we will see with our exploration of the ‘heterogeneous economy’ in Bataille (and that of the gift in Bataille and of the tragic in Krell), the ‘economy’ of Archaic life – living and dead – is that of the *gift*, as Mauss has portrayed in *The Gift*<sup>13</sup> – and, if one considers the significance of *potlatch* (self-destructive gift-giving) – that of *tragic sacrifice*.

The currency of this economy is that of ‘blood’, as we see in Homer, the insurrection of an underworld, engorged with spirits hungry for blood, flesh and body. The ‘body’ was greatly esteemed by the Greeks, and was nearly equated with life itself, or, at least, the *place* of life. Blood is the elixir of life, and flesh is the effervescent scintillation of life.

The hunger of the spirits intimates that the ‘afterlife’ in Hades is one of deficiency, of the pallid nostalgia of a shade, one who not only reminisces



upon its former life *as* body, but who also hungers for this life, for its blood and flesh. At the same time, the body also has the ethnological, political, and cultural significance, with respect to blood-ties and exclusive and individuated kinship groups which were of *existential* significance, as Cornford and Burkert have disclosed, to the Homeric, Apollonian culture.

Another significant aspect of the Homeric 'world', for our current study, on the other hand, is that of the interactive and fateful *topos* of divine beings and powers, and thus, of the vital nexus of the divine *Kosmos*. Indeed, it is an *arche-topos* which concerns us, in this way, of the intimation of a *place of all places*, and of the powers and aspects of this *architecture* of life and death. Epic narrative not only lays out the topography of the All, but also of the myriad actors upon this 'grand stage' (Shakespeare). It is amid this unfolding context, that of epic *poiesis*, that the specific powers are distributed, where Fate strings out the precise 'status' and destination of each amid the All. Within the dynamic context of the epic, the players are set free to embrace – or, to attempt to elude their fates, that spiralling context, that is All – we understand the 'economy'. Yet, this economy is the *topos* of events that happen 'due' to these actions and interactions of gods, goddesses and mortals. Sharing their fatal fate with doomed mortals, each of the gods also have limitations, and they can be affected by other gods and by men. Hera asks Sleep to go to Zeus, so that she can act without him seeing.

We become aware of the 'actors' from out of the *passage* of the narrative, and in this way, we could argue that Homer is, like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, an 'existential phenomenologist', one who crystallises his finite thought upon the *topos* of *poiesis*. But, of course, that would, simply, be just another anachronism.

## Hesiod

It is not difficult to accept Xenophanes's contention that Hesiod came after Homer as it would seem that the *Theogony* (seventh to eighth century B.C.E.) was a poetic articulation of a genealogy of the 'divine' and 'world' on the basis of the disparate epic narratives of Homer with his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Any notion that Homer postdates Hesiod and merely sets the *Theogony* to 'stories' is, of course, untenable as these 'stories' preceded both Homer and Hesiod. Nevertheless, the genealogy of Hesiod is significant, as it not only sets forth a compendium of the myriad births of the divine as 'world', but also sets forth the mytho-noetic *topos* of archaic thought textures and motifs, that clearly survive, and, indeed, thrive into the 'period' of 'philosophy' *proper*.

Chaos was first of all, but next appeared  
 Broad-bosomed Earth, sure standing-place for all  
 The gods who live on snowy Olympus' peak  
 And misty Tartarus, in a recess  
 Of broad pathed earth, and Love, most beautiful  
 Of all the deathless gods. He makes men weak,  
 He overpowers the clever mind, and tames  
 The spirit in the breast of men and gods.  
 From Chaos came black Night and Erebos.  
 And Night in turn gave birth to Day and Space  
 Whom she conceived in love with Erebos.  
 And Earth bore starry Heaven, first, to be  
 An equal to herself, to cover her  
 All over, and to be a resting-place,  
 Always secure, for all the blessed gods.

It is remarkable that this scenario exhibits such an overt affinity with the 'Pelagian Creation Myth', in which Eurynome dances upon the primordial waters (of chaos), giving birth to her male consort (Ophion, Ouranus), but that, in both instances, the males counterparts are to be lowered, or displaced, and perhaps, to be replaced with another *dyadic* pairing, as with Rhea and Kronos, and Hera and Zeus, or Eurynome in her *next work* of creation (as implicated in my adaptation of the Graves version). Another element that comes into play are the stories, such as Pandora's Box, which expresses the radical divide between 'mortal' and 'immortal', a dyad which is significant for the very *archictexture* of the world. Such a 'theological' and 'existential' motif would explain, for instance, the punishment of Prometheus, the Titan god, who gave humans his creation, fire. For Zeus, such a possession of godly gifts is dangerous, because it raises man up, narrowing the gap between man and the gods. While it is obvious that there are precise continuities between Homer and Hesiod and their own mytho-poetic contexts of emergence, it is also clear that there are continuities which grasp, point toward the 'future' – in the thought, philosophy, and mytho-poetic 'dramas' of the 'tragic age' of Greece. Beyond some facile notion that all of this is a 'background' for early Greek thought, it is clear – if we put down our various ego-optical 'spectacles', for the moment – that there are precise textures and motifs, which should not only be regarded as the *background* of archaic thought, but also as the specific 'forms' and 'elements' of expressions amid differing 'generational' articulations.

What does Hesiod give *us* – meaning in light of Aristotle’s assertions, ‘philosophers since Thales’? Chaos as the *first*, the four elements, successionist genealogy, deification or ‘personification’, and an architecture of the ‘world’. When Picasso emerged from the caves of Lascaux (upon which Bataille did the first investigatory work, and most likely suggested this site to Picasso, with whom he was friendly), in the Dordogne, in 1940, he lamented, ‘We have discovered nothing.’ Perhaps, we are in the same state of lament, languishment, abiding the *mere* nothing, and having mutilated our own genealogy to such an extent that we cannot recognise even Hesiod as the ‘founder’ of our ‘tradition’. We have laid out this rough sketch so that we can begin to examine our claim that there is no *radical* break between the ideas in Hesiod and the early Greek philosophers. There is, as Nietzsche suggests, an ‘abbreviation’, or ‘abbreviations’, but thought has the same root, the same genealogy.

Hesiod’s myths were, in his own era, ‘ancient’, before he ever implored the Muses to give him song, traced to the context of emergence of the purported ‘axial age’ – that *topos* we have invoked as the Mediterranean *life-world*: Sumerian, Babylonian, Mycenaen, Hittite, Assyrian, Egyptian. Hesiod ‘articulated’ these myths, those of his own context of emergence as his *Theogony*. It is important not to underestimate the impact of these sources, as we have already noticed. We can readily see, for instance, the influence of Babylonian creation myths and astro-mathematical practise upon, for instance, Thales, who would be incomprehensible without these and other genealogical considerations. The desire to fathom the *Kosmos* gave birth to the mytho-poetic narratives that express our mortal comportment with existence. But, it comes to a point when these myths are perhaps simply passed on, as ‘fact’. In this way, the knowledge may mutate from ‘authentic’ thought to an ‘inauthentic’ passing on. Examining this ‘facticity’ of truth is radical *hermeneutics*. When we read Hesiod, some of it is, as Nietzsche lambasted Plato in *Twilight of the Idols*, boring. These ‘lists’ do not speak to us anymore. We have lost touch with the details, and we readily throw them out. Instead, we should understand what it is Hesiod is trying to do, to see the *gestalt*.

### How Can Hesiod’s Theogony Be Understood As ‘Philosophy’?

Authentic philosophers try to retrieve ‘original’ questions – and, attempt to respond to these questions with plausible answers or approaches to answers.

*Mythos* requires tremendous sophistication and a myriad and enduring history for its development. Embedded within myth are deep structures which articulate radical variants of intellectual, existential and poetic decisions. Homer and Hesiod articulated a ‘literature’ that provided a context for the entire culture, one that was itself made possible by the introduction of a written alphabet by (it is thought) Phoenician marine traders.

In many ways, these various competing theogonies, or variant articulations of one and the same theogony attempt to answer not only the *question of the first* and *of being*, in light of the eternality of the *Kosmos* – but also, the question of becoming, of the *motive force*, powers, and the transformational configuration, of existence.

All of this is expressed in the poetic language of myth.

## The Genesis Myth

This piece may not usually be part of ‘Greek’ myth, but it was a part of the lifeworld of the poly-theology of the archaic Mediterranean ‘lifeworld’, not to mention the significance of this ‘possibility’ of mytho-poetic expression in light of the *différance* of Derrida.

In the beginning, when God created the universe,  
the earth was formless and desolate.  
The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness,  
and the power of God was moving over the water.  
Then God commanded, “Let there be light” – and light appeared.  
God was pleased with what he saw.  
Then he separated the light from the darkness,  
and he named the light “Day” and the darkness “Night”.  
Evening passed and morning came – the first day.’

This myth, composed at the same time as Hesiod’s *Theogony* in the seventh century – ‘historically’ negatively – echoes the *Pelasgian* account, and, it could be argued, seems to be a ‘patriarchal’ revision or transformation of the earlier myth. The characters undergo a radical reversal – the *Genesis* story gives an account, not only of the creation of the world by a male deity, but also the snake’s seduction of Eve, who leads Adam into sin. This mytho-poetic account seems to, perhaps, ‘demonise’ woman, while the earlier myth celebrated the goddess, Eurynome.

If we, for a moment, reflect upon the basic difference between a matriarchal and a patriarchal myth, we can detect traces of ‘everyday’ human existence in these accounts of ‘origin’. Power relationships, the valuation of people according to their gender, or other cultural aspects: to what extent do these features influence the poetic imagination in this mythical account? Do such considerations indicate an irreducibly existential and cultural reference and context for mythological poetics? If so, is there any manner by which we can discriminate between the ‘truth’ of the various accounts? Or, is there a way to transcend the ‘everyday’ and attain a universal expression of truth?

At the same time, regardless of the cultural facticity of the myths, we can still divine a ‘family resemblance’ between myriad myths, which exhibit an affinity with respect to mytho-poetic texture, for example the emergence from a primordial ‘first’ or ‘firsts’, as a differentiation of mere types. At the same time, there is a theological/philosophical difference in the conjecture of an external, male creator in *Genesis*, which is distinct, philosophically, from the immanent emergence of Eurynome and the world from Chaos. Or, as we will see in the following, for the early Greeks, that which is must have arisen from an indigenous context of play.

The early Greeks – receding as they seem into the remote mytho-poetic past, could not have countenanced the *creatio ex nihilo* of the Judeo-Christian theology (which seems even to be countered by some possible readings of the *Genesis* myth itself). In this light, it could be suggested that myth exhibits a cultural facticity in its narrative decisions, ‘factors’ that are augmented and even displaced by other considerations, such as poetic coherence and intellectual plausibility. At the end of the day, however, it can even be questioned if *ex nihilo nihil fit* was ever intended by *Genesis*. Such a ‘notion’, prominent among Christian theology and its ecclesiastics, seems to wish to wipe the slate clean – to begin anew, with a *marriage of light and darkness*, as Johannes Hoff<sup>14</sup> has illuminated in his in-depth reading of Nicolas of Cusa, of a ‘higher order synthesis’ of the Unity of the Divinity, of the ‘Godhead’ (Meister Eckhart) with the *polysemy* (polytheology) of the pagan tradition – with the result, the Holy Trinity. Such an intimation, however, indicates – still – Being, which is merely entitled ‘Nothing’ in light of the ontical profanity of language. Such notions are not in schism – necessarily – with Parmenides and the entire expression of the early Greek tradition – yet, it may be asked if it is in tune with the ‘first order’ *mythologies* of historical, and contemporary, ‘Christianities’. It must be asked, as an *outsider*, ‘What if the people, the ‘body of the Church’, became apprised of the ‘heresies’ of their teachers, that all the ‘stories’ are Noble Lies, pointing to *something else besides*?

Would there be a revolution of inquisition, the *grand inquisitor* being the *docile*, those meek ones who have – for millennia – sustained the beehive indoctrination of catechism. Will they accept this sacrilege of *their* myths, of their own subterranean heathenism?

## Archilochus and Sappho – Early Greek Lyric Poetry

As we will see in the next chapter on Nietzsche and tragedy, Homer and Hesiod are to be regarded as Apollonian artists as each seeks to conjure a magical dream image that will act as a redemptive illusion over against the terrible Dionysian truth (the chaos) of existence. We could grasp such a claim not only in light of the tragic substitutions, sublimations of chaos in the successionist *Theogony*, but also with respect to the magical *lifeworld* invoked by Homer in his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In both cases, the dream consists of the *individuation* of significant beings, both mortal and immortal, each of which fated by *Moirai* to pass over into that Night of nothingness, to chaos, primordial being. To this extent alone, we could regard Homer and Hesiod as tragic *de facto*. While this may allude to the sense of the tragic for Heidegger, as we will explore in Chapter 4, this is not the ‘immediate’ sense of the tragic for Nietzsche. Of course, Nietzsche’s work on tragic drama transcends a mere glance upon this seminal art-form and immediately exalts a philosophical, *existenz* significance. Nevertheless, Nietzsche is specifying a meta-historical genealogy which speaks of the ‘death of tragedy’. Of course, Dionysus and his love for his brother is *not* dead, but the aesthetic conditions of Christianity have worked to suppress – and have revalued – these intimations of the Dionysian. It is not sufficient to have an intellectual insight, and intellectual intuition of the ‘tragic’ – that which is necessary is not only an honesty with respect to the ‘state of affairs’ which prevails in the era of nihilism, but also, with respect to the artist of tragedy, and the ‘conditions’ necessary for the emergence of the artist. The tragic may be our primordial state, but the ‘recognition’ of this state of being is not adequate for an authentic thought and comportment with respect to this Fate.<sup>15</sup>

While we will seek to fathom the labyrinth betwixt Nietzsche and Heidegger in the next two chapters, in the present context I would like to trace one *pregnant* indication of Nietzsche, with respect the primal ‘conditions’ for the emergence of tragedy, which is that of *lyric* poetry. For there is something to be learned from a meticulous attention to ‘changes’, to the phases of difference, such as the apparent setting-free (*Gelassenheit*) that seemingly arose between Homer and Hesiod, on one hand, and Archilochus,

Sappho and Pindar, on the other. Indeed, an interesting ambiguity emerges between these generations of poetics in which, on the one hand (which Nietzsche does not really expose), the lyric poet, praised by Delphic Oracle of Apollo, seeks to express the utmost singularity of the Apollonian ideal of 'individuality', but, amid an exploration of the depths of *this* self (remembering Heraclitus, on the depths of the *logos*), on the other hand, awakens utter depths, 'wild dogs barking in the cellar', an abyss that ironically shatters the redemptive illusion. Plunging into the primordial depths of *eros*, of eroticism, we wander in frenzy amid a *topos* of primordial oneness prior to the event of individuation. In *this* way, lyric poetry is exposed as a precursor to Attic tragedy in its clandestine marriage of Apollo and Dionysus. This ambiguity of the self announces the emergence of tragedy, as the music of primordial chaos becomes the melody of the mortal self, one who glimpses eternity, singularity upon the precipice of its own dire plunge into the abyss. This is incipient tragedy from the perspective of the tragic hero.

In this light, I would like to turn to the poets, Archilochus, Sappho, and Pindar, who are not only significant within the Nietzschean genealogy (and Nietzsche does not mention Sappho), but also as exemplars of the generation of poets between Homer, Hesiod – and those regarded by the 'tradition' as not only the first tragic poets, but, perhaps, with more resonance in terms of our current study, 'philosophy in the tragic age of Greece'. For, there is not only the 'self' and its tragic fate that is at issue, but also the question of the relationship of the alleged 'first' philosophers – and the mytho-poetic *context of emergence*. The lyric poets make it clear that the self has emerged as a thoughtful and expressive force, though one which retains respect for the context of the *lifeworld*, but at once, announcing the singular mortal individual and his and her tragic desires. Yet, from the perspective of Nietzsche's 'inverted world', these lyric poets, as they express imitations of music, as opposed to the imitation of appearances in the *epos* of Homer, are already masks of Dionysus as the self-expression of the primordial All – in the sense of and illusion of an illusion, a dream within a dream (Edgar Allan Poe).

### Archilochus (680–645)

This poem was found *tellingly* wrapped in the funeral textiles on a corpse.

'If lust for the acts you urge brooks  
no delay,  
there lives with us a lovely,

gentle maid who longs to marry.  
Her form is perfection.  
Make her your own dear wife.'  
I answered her speech, point by point.  
'Child of a fine  
lady, Amphimedo, imprisoned  
now in the damp earth, for young  
men the goddess  
provides numerous pleasures  
besides the divine thing. Any  
will do, and we  
shall consider the question at leisure  
tonight, you, the goddess, and I,  
the decision being yours,  
but I have a pressing need.  
Just concede the lower walls  
and area around  
the gate. My advance will stop  
in the grassy garden. Neobule? Aiai!  
Some other man  
can have her. Her fruit is overripe.  
Maidenhood's flower has gone to seed.  
Her charm is withered.  
Never satisfied in youth,  
she is now a woman governed by passion.  
The crows can have her!  
Zeus, never decree  
that I become a laughingstock  
by having such  
a wife. I far prefer  
a simple, honest girl like you.  
Neobule is fast;  
she has a legion of lovers.  
I fear that I would bear "blind puppies  
and miscarriages," if I did  
anything rash with her.'  
Finished with talk, I grabbed the girl  
and laid her down  
on a bed of flowers. My cloak  
provided shelter. I held her neck



in the crook of my arm.  
 She was frozen with fear, like a fawn.  
 With my hands I fondled her breasts, whose smoothness  
 evinced puberty's  
 recent arrival, and the rest  
 of her beautiful body, then shot my white  
 force, lightly  
 touching her yellow hair.<sup>16</sup>

We can witness from this lyric expression of hyper-Apollonian 'lust' the 'white force' of Dionysian power which shoots upon the 'yellow hair' amidst the dissolution of the individual.

I would like to next gaze at Sappho so as to intimate the radical 'multilateralism' of the seventh and sixth century, just prior to the so-called emergence of 'philosophy'. It is the self-exploration of the finite being which is expressed, but a self-expression that still retains a habitat and an affinity to the context of the mytho-poetic *topos* of the meta-narrative of the erotic alchemy of life. It is Sappho who most radically expresses a radical tenuousness and susceptibility to 'Dionysiac madness', one that expresses both the fruits and the *flowers of evil*<sup>17</sup> of 'individuality'.

### Sappho of Lesbos (630–570)

To me the man who happens to sit  
 opposite you seems like a god  
     as bending close he listens and replies  
     to your sweet voice  
     and fetching laughter; such exchange  
     makes my heart pound with alarm.  
 Let me so much as glimpse you, my voice  
 fails me completely.  
 My tongue is broken; a subtle flame  
 instantly courses beneath my skin.  
 No vision is left in my eyes. A whirring  
 fills my ears.  
 Cold sweat flows. Trembling  
 shakes my entire frame. I grow  
 paler than grass and feel as though  
 I have nearly died.<sup>18</sup>

This singularity of expression, of the depths, forbids a mere acquiescence to the blood kinship of convention, of the canon – the poets were those, in this context, who broke with ‘style’, and its propriety, though, the excavated *context of emergence* shows itself as the place – *topos* – of the mytho-poetic horizon of expression, one that intimates a ‘continuity’ . . . Yet, this expression is different to the ‘normative’ expressivity of the Apollonian epic and catalogue. ‘Difference’ – to the extent that the poets are expressing the catastrophes of the ‘individual’ – and, from one’s own point of view, amid one’s own ‘event’. The ‘irony’ – the utter singularity of a mortal self is disclosed as the radical ‘communion’ of tragic existence, of the Dionysian.

## Pindar (522–443)

### Pythian Odes, Three

If I were permitted  
to utter the prayer  
in everyone’s mind,  
I would wish that Chiron,  
son of Philyra and sovereign Kronos,  
a friend of mankind,  
now dead and gone,  
were living still  
and that he ranged  
the ridges of Pelion,  
even as he was  
when he raised Asklepios,  
the gentle hero, craftsman  
in remedies for the limbs of men  
tormented by disease.  
Before his mother,  
daughter of Phlegyas the rider,  
could bring him to birth,  
before Eleithia could ease her pangs,  
she sank to the house of Death,  
stricken in her chamber  
by the gold arrows of Artemis  
at the urging of Apollo:  
the wrath of gods  
finds fulfillment.

In her folly.  
she had slighted him, consenting –  
without her father's knowledge –  
to another union  
though she had lain before with Apollo  
and bore the god's pure seed within her.  
She did not wait for her marriage feast,  
the high cries of *Hymen! Hymen!*  
such as girls of her age, maiden companions,  
echo in song, bantering the bride  
with girlhood names on her wedding night.  
No: like many another, she hungered  
for things remote.

There are some, utterly  
shiftless, who always look ahead,  
scorning the present,  
hunting the wind of doomed hopes.  
Eager Koronis, fond of gay clothing,  
was wholly taken  
with this infatuation – she lay  
in the arms of a stranger  
who came from Arkadia,  
but she did not escape her watcher:  
Loxias [Apollo] the king,  
in his temple at Delphi,  
heard what had happened,  
informed by his surest confidant,  
echo in song, bantering the bride  
his all-knowing mind  
impervious to lies,  
beyond the reach of mortal  
or immortal deception,  
of fraud planned or perpetrated.  
He saw her then,  
lying in bed with Ischys,  
son of Elatos –  
he saw her blasphemous deceit  
and sent down Artemis  
raging with anger  
to Lakereia, for the maiden dwelled

on the banks of Lake Boibias.  
An evil power  
possessed and destroyed her  
and many others  
were involved in her ruin.  
Though but a spark of fire  
fall on the mountain,  
the thick trees blaze and are gone.  
Only when her kinsmen had placed the girl  
on a wooden mound and the grim glare of flame  
ran crackling around her  
did Apollo relent:  
'I cannot kill my own child, trapped  
in the doom of its ruined mother,'  
he said, and strode into the blaze.  
The fire hid nothing from him:  
in one step  
he found the corpse, tore the infant from it,  
and carried it to Chiron in Thessaly  
to be taught the art of medicine.  
And those who came to him  
with flesh-devouring sores,  
with limbs gored by gray bronze  
or crushed beneath flung stones,  
all those with bodies broken,  
sun-struck or frost-bitten,  
he freed of their misery,  
each from his ailment,  
and led them forth –  
some to the lull of soft spells,  
others by potions,  
still others with bandages  
steeped in medications  
culled from all quarters,  
and some he set right through surgery.  
But even wisdom feels  
the lure of gain –  
gold glittered in his hand,  
and he was hired  
to retrieve from death

a man already forfeit:  
the son of Kronos [Zeus] hurled  
and drove the breath,  
smoking from both their chests –  
savior and saved alike  
speared by the lightning flash.  
From the gods we must expect  
things that suit our mortal minds,  
aware of the here and now,  
aware of our allotment.  
Do not yearn, O my soul, for immortal life!  
Use to the utmost  
the skill that is yours.  
Yet if wise Chiron still haunted his cave,  
if my singing had worked upon his mood  
like a soothing drug, I would have moved him  
to rear another healer, a son of Leto  
or of Zeus, a hero to relieve good men  
of the blaze of fever.  
And I would have come,  
cleaving the Ionian sea on ship,  
to Arethusa's fountain and my Aitnaian host  
who holds the throne of Syracuse,  
a king gentle to his citizens  
and generous to his nobles,  
a father to arriving strangers.  
If I had stepped from ship  
bringing this double grace to him,  
golden health and a revel-song  
to brighten his triumphs,  
the Pythian garlands  
Pherenikos took at Kirrha once,  
beating all contenders:  
I say I would have crossed  
the deep sea  
like a radiance reaching  
farther than a heavenly star  
But I wish to make my prayer  
to the sacred Mother Goddess  
whom Theban maidens celebrate

all the night through,  
singing of her and of Pan  
not far from where I dwell.  
If, Hieron, you understand,  
recall the proverb now:  
the deathless gods  
dole out to death-bound men  
two pains for every good.  
Fools make nothing of either.  
The noble turn both to advantage,  
folding pain within,  
and showing beauty without.  
You have a share of happiness – on you,  
if on any man, great destiny has smiled,  
for you are master of a people.  
Still,  
no life was ever safe from falling:  
not even Peleus,  
the son of Aiakos, or Kadmos, the gods' double,  
knew perfect bliss, though men account them  
blest with the highest joy –  
they heard the Muses singing  
on the mountain and in seven-gated Thebes,  
when Kadmos married dark-eyed Harmonia  
and Peleus married Thetis, the glorious daughter of Nereus,  
and the gods feasted  
in their company,  
the children of Kronos,  
kings on golden thrones:  
they beheld them  
and received their wedding gifts.  
So Zeus blessed them with a change  
from former troubles,  
and their hearts were high.  
But in time again  
Kadmos lost his share of bliss:  
three of his daughters destroyed it  
and yet the fourth,  
white-armed lovely Thyona,  
welcomed Zeus to her bed.

And the only child [Achilles]  
of Peleus and immortal Thetis,  
felled by an arrow in war  
and leaving life behind,  
stirred the lament of the Danaans  
as he burned on the pyre.  
It is proper that a mortal man,  
knowing the way of truth,  
prosper from the gods  
when he has the chance.  
Winds soar on high –  
one is a blessing, another is not.  
Happiness that wafts a man  
in full sail  
will not sustain him long.  
I will be small among the small,  
great among the great.  
The spirit embracing me  
from moment to moment I will cultivate,  
as I can and as I ought.  
And if the gods bestow  
abundant wealth on me, then I will hope  
to find high glory in days to come.  
We know of Nestor and Lykian Sarpedon  
from resonant words, such as skilled craftsmen of songs  
have welded together.  
It is radiant poetry  
that makes virtue long-lived,  
but for few is the making easy.<sup>19</sup>

Pindar exclaims – a contemporary of Aeschylus – they were born three years apart –

Do not yearn, O my soul, for immortal life!

He also says,

like many another, she hungered  
for things remote.  
There are some, utterly

shiftless, who always look ahead,  
 scorning the present,  
 hunting the wind of doomed hopes.

He is a tragic lyric-epic poet of the tragic age, not a dramatist, though attuned with thought, a contemporary of Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus – and Aeschylus and Pythagoras – though Socrates would have been a ‘youth’ in comparison to these sages – at least at this ‘point’. Aeschylus enacted, dramatized, the tragic existential dilemma of Pindar. We must think this nexus, this order of relations, this world, significance, in context. Pindar expresses our tragic existence plainly, he *sings* attuned with this ‘tragic’. The activity of Pindar, contemporaneous with the works of Aeschylus, testifies, moreover, to the persistence of lyrical poetics as a morphology of tragic expression. Hölderlin, the poet, who translated Pindar – and, who could have easily been one of his characters – purportedly sinks into ‘madness’ – intimating the late existence of the tragic lyric and foreshadowing the tragic fate of Trakl.

The ‘death of God’ is the remedy for the utter affliction of ‘Romanticism’. ‘Beauty’, as will see in our discussion of Plato, in Chapter 13, must meet the ‘Sublime’.

## Transitions

We have travelled from the depths of Mesopotamian mytho-poiesis, through its many chaotic traces to the ambiguous ‘self’ of archaic lyric poetry. Perhaps lyric poetry has been our true goal all along, the poetry of the ‘self’ amid its ambiguous finitude. In the event of its climax, of its transgression of the limits of its self, it knows itself no more, in its ecstasy – it breaks through the principle of sufficient reason, of individuation, exposing itself as a mask of the primordial one, of Being.

Yet, as we ‘die off’ in our romantic adventures, there are still those left behind amid the tragic *lifeworld* of the *sensus communis*, this Dionysian ‘community’, that of the musical Chorus which possesses the ‘wisdom of ages’. The tragic hero, individuation, emerges as the Apollonian dream image from amid the music of life, but returns to its source, to its abysmal Fate. While individuation is necessary, affirmative, it is this communion of Dionysus, music, which recalls each singular being to its destiny amid the primordial chaos of Being.

We will now turn to a consideration of Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, a text which lays out one possible genealogy of a ‘context of emergence’ of early



'Greek' thought – one cast into relief as a confrontation between, on the one hand, the conservative Doric culture, intimated in the Apollonian poetry of Homer and Hesiod over against the radical 'Thracian' and other 'barbaric' cultures, symbolised in the Dionysian poetry and our code word 'Orpheus'. It will be in the context of this confrontation that we will further specify the context of emergence for early Greek philosophy in the age of tragedy. This text is emphasised as it alone attempts a genealogical hermeneutics of early Greek philosophy that is sensitive to the radical 'context of emergence'. Of course, this remains a 'rough sketch', and must be seen as a gesture toward future research . . . meditations . . . 'revisions', which will be attempted in the current study. That which is the case – the 'things themselves' – is given a differing sense in the emerging contexts of differing thinkers, amid the terrain of tragic existence.

## Chapter 3

# ‘War is the Mother of all things’: Nietzsche and the Birth of Philosophy

Heidegger states with some irony (and parody) that Nietzsche is the ‘Discoverer of the Greeks’, the Columbus of a ‘New World’, one that allows us to begin to break free from the *errancy* of the metaphysical epoch, from the ‘history of Being’. In this light, Nietzsche’s noble gesture toward the ‘Greeks’ is doubly ironic, in that he not only points to a way out of ‘Platonistic’ metaphysical epoch, but also completes this epoch, thus, remaining its prisoner. However, before we delve into the devastating, and rather dismissive, criticisms of Nietzsche by Heidegger, we must first turn to Nietzsche’s work on the ‘Greeks’, and, specifically, the early Greeks so as to learn why the appellation ‘discoverer of the Greeks’ is not at all entirely inappropriate. For, while Heidegger, in his account of the early Greek thinkers – or at least those who he deems worthy of his attention, the ‘primordial thinkers’ – is persuasive to the patient reader, it is not clear if his criticisms of Nietzsche – many of which are orientated by Heidegger’s own politically inspired interpretation of Nietzsche in the early 1940s<sup>1</sup> – are at the end of the day hermeneutically sound readings of Nietzsche’s *authentic* contribution to a retrieval of early Greek thought – or, of ‘philosophy in the tragic age’.

In this way, it will be our task to grasp the radical sense of Nietzsche’s ‘discovery’ in light of his own unfinished and unpublished manuscript, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of Greece* and his genealogy of Attic tragedy, published as *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. We will also consider, when necessary, Nietzsche’s other works on the ‘Greeks’ – and it could be argued that *all* of his work pertains to the ‘Greeks’ in one way or another, not merely his early essays, such as ‘Homer’s Contest’, ‘The Greek State’ and ‘The Greek Woman’, but also, later works, such as *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Genealogy of Morals*, *Twilight of the Idols*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *The Anti-Christ*. Yet, our perspective across the following pages will emphasize his early works upon tragedy and tragic thought of the so-called ‘pre-platonic philosophers’, as Nietzsche calls them.

## Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks – ‘On Incompletion’

There are compelling reasons not to trust *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* as the definitive – if that would ever be possible – expression of Nietzsche’s interpretation of the early ‘Greek’ thinkers – whom he calls ‘philosophers’, perhaps to Heidegger’s disdain. Our scepticism should not merely be inspired by the fact that the text is ‘incomplete’ (for Bataille – and Heidegger in light of the *unsaid*, and Derrida, in light of deconstructive protocols, *all* texts will always be ‘incomplete’), but that this manuscript, text, in our parlance, is not his *last word*. From what we ‘know’ about Nietzsche’s practice of writing, it is possible that he did nothing with this text in light of his own judgment that it was not that ‘important’. Of course, we can never ‘know’ the *ultimate* ‘privacy’ of any singular mortal, but our own judgment may lead us to the same conclusion. Yet, for whatever reason, we are left with an unpublished, unfinished manuscript, and this is our first recourse in our attempt to grasp the sense of ‘Nietzsche and the Greeks’. Nevertheless, we ‘know’ that this manuscript was written at the same time as, not only *The Birth of Tragedy*, but also, his other unfinished, unpublished essay, ‘Truth and Lying in the Extra-Moral Sense.’ Of course, the ‘last word’ of Nietzsche is fragmented into *last words*, expressed within and across the context of his later narrative of ‘nihilism’ and the ‘twilight of the idols’.

The pre-eminent ‘reason’ for our cautious distrust of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* lies instead in its virtual lack of the ‘tragic’. We will explore Heidegger’s ‘problem’ with this text – and his oblique reference in his lecture course *Parmenides* to the notion of the ‘Dionysian’<sup>2</sup> in *The Birth of Tragedy* in the next chapter. Yet, the text, *as it is*, seems to make no connection to his contemporaneous work, neither to *The Birth of Tragedy*, nor to ‘Truth and Lying in the Extra-Moral Sense’.

*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* expresses *nothing* at all about the ‘tragic’ – indeed, it does not even seem to mention it. In fact, there seems to be no connection at all between these mentioned works. His work on the philosophers of the tragic age, as Heidegger echoes, is ‘commonplace’ – indeed, Nietzsche’s ‘portrayal’ of the early ‘Greeks’ – the so-called ‘pre-platonic philosophers’ – never *breaches* the question of *tragedy*, of the mortality of existence. Again, his portrayal of the early Greeks is ‘commonplace’, which means that he does not say anything ‘new’ or ‘original’. We cannot merely excuse the *text* since its ‘exists’ in a state of ‘incompleteness’. If ‘truth be told’, Nietzsche does *do* something ‘new’ in his own context of philological, scholarly work, in his aspiration to ‘sketch’ each ‘personality’ of the early

Greek 'philosophers'. 'Personality' – what does Nietzsche mean, intend, with this word? He does not fulfil his promise as his 'picture' of the 'early Greeks' does not disclose any traces of 'personal being', of mortal 'personality'.

Personality is a mask of tragedy, but Nietzsche does not say this in his work. It is in this light our task to divine the hidden connections between *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 'Truth and Lying' and *the Tragic*. Personality – as the Apollonian – is tragic in itself. And so is truth and lying. The opening scenario of the latter essay, telling the tale of a planet of clever, though, doomed animals, intimates, from the outset the tragic situation – of the ubiquitous illusion of 'knowledge', this high art of 'science' – this phantasm of Apollonian redemption, of lying optimism and pride. Personality itself is an illusion, a phantasm that inhabits the peripheral limit of 'knowledge' – indeed for Kant, a 'regulative idea', for Heidegger, a creature of the transcendental imagination, a projection of temporality, a finite, makeshift mask. Personality is an art, for Nietzsche, but so is knowledge – our pretence that our truth is the 'truth' is our first lie, our last error, an event which ceaselessly overcomes itself in ever wider circuits of errancy. Each circuit ironically claims to supersede the preceding as the true 'truth' until, with Heidegger, there is only a history of Being, a history of 'truth' – and no truth itself, as the truth as the *event* prior to the first lie, before the phantasm, the simulacrum (Jean Baudrillard), itself concealed *as* the ever spiralling circuits of errancy. Art, however – which Nietzsche traces in the notes toward the completion of 'Truth and Lying' – is a lie that is alone capable of telling the truth, as it is honest about itself – that it is a lie. Nietzsche also writes:

The poet, who can  
willingly and knowingly lie,  
can alone tell the truth.<sup>3</sup>

Personality, conceived as an artwork, as the mask of the tragic hero, the Janus face of tragic mortality, may be such an honest lie, if the poet behind the mask not only admits the terrible truth of mortal annihilation, but also expresses the affirmation of the primordial uncertainty and, thus, the poetic character of all attempts to glimpse truth in her own domain. Nietzsche would thus seem, with his ironic suggestion that 'truth be woman', to be echoing Friedrich Schlegel's own sentiment,

Women do not have as great a need for poetry  
because their own essence is poetry.<sup>4</sup>

It would have been of great moment had Nietzsche been able to complete his work upon philosophy in the tragic age, though there remains a question which forces itself upon us – is the lack of any explicit development of the theme of tragedy in this work a symptom of revulsion about which we have been musing – or is philosophy, as with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, something other than tragedy – even for the so-called pre-platonic philosophers? Is his reference to philosophers such as Pythagoras and Empedocles in *The Birth of Tragedy* a suggestion of their own tragic status? Heidegger, as we have seen, insists that the early Greek thinkers are just that – thinkers. They were not ‘philosophers’, which for him in this context – and which seems to agree with Wittgenstein’s peculiar usage of the term ‘philosophy’ in his later work – would mean that ‘philosophy’ is a later ‘development’, perhaps philosophy itself is the first lie, the first step of errancy, of ‘metaphysics’ in the philosophy of Plato, nihilism. Or is reference to ‘philosophy’ among the early Greeks an error of method, an anachronism, intellectual sloppiness? Nevertheless, whether we use the word ‘thinker’ or ‘philosopher’ – though the word is said to have been coined by Pythagoras, one who need not be immediately associated with Plato at all – we must be clear regarding the sense of the usage which will serve as a formal indicator of the phenomenon of early Greek thought, one that must be excavated and disclosed from its own indigenous *topos* and intimate horizons. Nietzsche does not give us much in our attempt to answer serious questions that have arisen in our inquiry. Yet, if we can show that the early Greek thinkers were in accord with the tragic dramatists with respect to the uncertainty of the poet and the tragic character of human existence – that the ‘philosophers’ – even those prior to Plato – were not enemies of tragedy, but that they were tragic philosophers of the tragic age, then can begin to grasp not only the specificity of early Greek thought in terms of its indigenous sensibility, but will also, perhaps, be able to discern the specificity of the ‘Greek phenomenon’ itself. It is in this light that the essay on ‘Truth and Lying’ (in the extra-moral sense, given that Euripides and Socrates were the ‘inventors’ of morality) may serve as a clue to our questions regarding the character of a tragic philosopher, or of tragic philosophy or thought. The essay points us toward art in its honest lying, its truth-telling in deception, of the poet who ‘knowingly’ and ‘willingly’ lies. We will recall that knowing and willing are the stems of the tree of Kantian reason, the theoretical and the practical – personality is the great artwork of the will, one that is a needful fiction, a necessary illusion, at best, as we have alluded, a ‘regulative idea’. The ‘truth’ that the lying poet tells, in this case the lie of personality, is that of the uncertainty and finitude of human existence, which redeems itself in the

protective illusions of art, whether this art be that of theoretical, practical, aesthetic or existential *poiesis*. 'Truth and Lying' points our 'empty hands' to the art of the Tragic Dithyramb, a phantasm, a lie, that discloses the tragic truth in the illusory masks of the tragic myth – masks which horizon our existence amidst the sublime context, one from which Kant recoiled.

In this light, we will thus work, in the following, under the preliminary 'decision' that the early Greek thinkers were indeed tragic thinkers, tragic philosophers in the tragic age of Greece. We will be able to make a judgement upon this decision when we turn to the early Greek thinkers themselves, interpreted in light of their own context of emergence – and not according to the anachronistic schemas of the hegemonic narratives of the 'dawn' of Western philosophy. We will thus turn to *The Birth of Tragedy* so as to undertake an exploration of its own genealogy of early Greek tragedy – and thus of thought – and of Nietzsche's manner of disclosing the conflictual and divergent *topos* of influence that has been suggested in terms of the hermeneutical method that is being performed in the current study.

### Nietzsche's Genealogy of Tragic Poetry and Philosophy: *The Birth of Tragedy*

If we are to understand the *context of emergence* for early Greek philosophy, we must – if we are to listen to Nietzsche – break out of our captivation to the image of Greek thought as somehow *sui generis*, and instead, trace the erratic genealogy of its emergence in its *mixed* character. This mixed character is expressly thematized in Nietzsche's account of the birth of tragedy as a protracted warfare of two distinct aesthetic types, the Apollonian and Dionysian, in the first millennium (and before). It is through the marriage of light and darkness of these, at first, opposing types that not only Greek poetic drama but also, we 'postulate', early Greek philosophy arose (Cicero, for instance, attests that Aeschylus was a follower of Pythagoras in the sixth century<sup>5</sup>).

These differing types are indicated by their own literary and artistic expressions, with Homer and Hesiod, epic, plastic arts, and dream, as exemplars of that which Nietzsche paints as the conservative Apollonian establishment, and of Orpheus and Orphic poetry, music, and the communal ecstasy of the orgiastic Dionysian insurgency.

In light of our previous suggestions of the status of 'Orphicism' as a code word for aspects of Near Eastern mytho-poetic thought, this approach allows us to begin to address the distorted image of ancient Greece in its

apparent ‘disconnect’ from its own historical context, and to prepare us perhaps for the deeper question of the significance of ancient Greek culture *per se* (to the exclusion of other ancient cultures, not to mention the question of the repetition of such inclusivity of our own culture vis-à-vis our valuations upon the meaning and value of *other* contemporary cultures and civilisations).

In the following, we will examine each aspect in turn, of Apollo and Dionysus, before considering the conflicts, precursors and ‘conditions’ for the ‘marriage of light and darkness’ that was Greek tragedy and thought.

### On the Apollonian

Nietzsche, in his *The Birth of Tragedy from out of the Spirit of Music*, may perhaps be regarded as the first philosopher to address and attempt to answer the question of the *context of emergence* with his own ‘creative’, or ‘unhistorical’ (*Untimely Meditations*, ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’) genealogy of early Greek tragedy and thought from out of its own *mixed* historical and cultural contexts. For while Nietzsche may have lamented his own inability to sing *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is clear – on the basis of his own claims in this work, especially when read together with his essays ‘On Truth and Lying’ and ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ – that *The Birth of Tragedy* is a work of art, a lie and an expression of the *unhistorical*. We should neither read these claims as denunciations, nor as a facile adulation or insipid claim that *The Birth of Tragedy* is a work of literature – or, even that it is a work of *poiesis*, for this would apply to ‘science’ or, indeed, to any activity, as we are instructed by Aristotle. Indeed, the claim made here has more specific intentions, and significance with respect to the practise of ‘historiography’ in its own fragile, deluded ‘grasp’ of that which *has been* amidst the *historicality* of human existence. *The Birth of Tragedy* – is it a work of ‘historiography’, a book of ‘history’?

In his essay on history – analysed by Heidegger in *Being and Time* – Nietzsche speaks of three postures of ‘historiography’ – the well-known triune of ‘Antiquarian’, ‘Monumental’, and ‘Critical’ approaches to ‘history’. Yet, it is the fourth moment that is more interesting for our current study – that of the ‘unhistorical’. This is the hidden bind that ties together each of the other modalities of history – it is the *topos* of artistic creativity which originally gives rise to narrative, to the falsification (synthesis), the lie which turns that which is ‘mixed’ into that which has the character of ‘aesthetic unity’, of ‘truth’. Such a lying *in the grand sense* is, thus, exhibited on at least

two levels in *The Birth of Tragedy*. On the one hand, there is the 'lie' of the narrative genealogy itself, that of the tale told of the emergence of Greek tragedy from out of the mixed and agonistic terrain of its cultural natality. On the other hand, there is the lie of the existential 'event' of the emergence of a novel cultural and artistic 'form'. Of course, the levels, in the present context, need not – nor could there be any way to decide if these levels – concur, as there are indeed other narratives of the 'event'. For – let us be clear – there was an 'event' – the tree lies in the forest, we know that it once grew – we may tell a story about how it came to lie in the forest. Nietzsche tells us one story. Yet, it is story that has weight in that it attempts to transcend, to destroy, the limitations of the 'timely'.

The Apollonian is associated with an indigenous 'Greek' self-understanding, 'found' in Hesiod and Homer and their epic narratives of the birth of divine beings and of the successive overthrows of gods by gods across the tragic dispersion of temporality. Nietzsche associates an Apollonian aesthetic type with epic narrative, and contends that it is exemplified by Greek monumental architecture – traditional, rigid and conventional. Apollo and Apollonian refer to the plastic arts, to the dream image, rhythm, order, structure, sculpture and epic poetry. Of course, and immediately, we are seized with ambivalence in light of Nietzsche's attribution of 'conservatism' to Homer and Hesiod. Indeed, it is clear that Xenophanes condemned these writers as obscene and impious, as they attributed 'decadent' actions and thoughts to the gods – a decadent conservatism perhaps. Yet, over against the Dionysian insurgency, this Apollonian culture of Homer and Hesiod would be 'conservative'. We cannot even begin to contend with the ironic 'genealogies' of Penglase, which would already situate Homer and Hesiod amid the orbit of Near Eastern mytho-poetic topographies. But, we must remember Burkert's dication of an 'orientalizing revolution' in the sixth century – with no mention of Nietzsche.

It is clear that 'classicists' will never listen to 'philosophy' or to 'philosophers', since we are always rather bad 'philologists'. Yet, that is the point after all – philosophy explodes, erupts, in its most authentic guise in the 'unhistorical'.

Perhaps – it was 'philosophy' – as Pythagoras was the teacher of Aeschylus – which laid the 'ground' for the 'birth of tragedy'. These dangerous *perhapses* . . .

Apollo – the god of medicine and the deity who kills from afar – the god of abjection and the one who keeps his distance, the patron of the bow, of the archer, Paris. It is 'clear', in our current study, that Apollo is a symbol, signifier of the 'principle of individuation', of *this*, of the 'present' existence



of *myself*, of tragic 'personality'. 'I' am the mask of the poet, as in a dream, melody – rhythm of mortal existence – individuation – of the singular – a revelation of myself exalts in an utter dissolution of self, of the tragic individual into the All – each and all. All in All. This intimates the other 'aesthetic' power, the primordial One, Dionysus.

Yet, before we delve into the Dionysian *hen*, we must be reminded that Apollo is not the 'one' against 'many' of false etymologies, but *is* the light which opens up the *topos* for a disclosure of that which is *there*. Apollo is illustrated with the glow of the rising sun, not as one who seeks to flee from its primordial link to Earth, but as the light which allows each to come to light as itself. The 'redemptive illusion' must not be regarded as merely 'imaginary' in a modernist, dismissive sense, but as a clearing, leeway or playspace for being. It is clear that the playspace is surrounded by the horizon of temporality, yet, the proliferation of beings is not only the 'fulfilment' of being, but also is the 'revelation' of *that which is the case* – and which is the place, possibility of an affirmation of tragic existence. The radically affirmative possibility of tragic pessimism is that which immediately opens a chasm between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, for whom the 'principle of individuation' must be, in an echo of Silenus, that which is either never to be, or if it is to be, to be ended as soon as possible. This attempt to silence the individual Will, of the music of individuated life is, however, futile – only for it to merely descend again into the primordial Will – only to be returned – is this not the highest absurdity, self-contradiction – hypocrisy – for a quintessentially musical personality, one who played the flute each day after he had his dinner? At the same time, such a consideration may allow us to not only specify the sense and polemical horizons of Nietzsche's interpretation of the birth of tragic philosophy and dramatic art, but also to begin to grasp a 'preference' for the Buddhist East (or that which was regarded as the 'Oriental', another modernist construct) that is characteristic of Schopenhauer's philosophy. That which distinguishes Tragedy from that which Schopenhauer regards as a Buddhist annihilation of the will is that the latter, ironically, seeks to escape from the cycles of *Samsara*, to be released from suffering, from the 'ego' – to flee into the silence of Nirvana, of the Nothing. Tragedy does not seek an escape, but affirms the utter destruction of the self as the incipient 'event' of its eternal rebirth, of its belonging to the primordial fertility of Being, of each and All. It is with this question that we can begin to grasp the continuity of Nietzsche's interpretation of the affirmative heart of tragic pessimism and his later vision of the 'eternal recurrence of the same'. Indeed, such a tragic vision of the eternal recurrence of the same, as disseminated by the god-philosopher Dionysus,

would have been the more appropriate content of a work on philosophy of the tragic age. Such a reading is supported by Nietzsche's later references to, for instance, Empedocles, a fellow devotee of Dionysus and the pagan philosophy of conflagration and rebirth.

### On the Dionysian

One of the most penetrating suggestions by Nietzsche is that tragedy is the incessant recapitulation of the death of God – in this case, the death of the god, Dionysus. With each telling of the story, the god is reborn within the Apollonian space of light. It is, in this way, that we are called to remember the death and rebirth of the god amid the immanence of our life upon the Earth. For that which is termed the cathartic state by Aristotle in his *Poetics* is not the emotional release of modernist psychological theories, but the conjuration by the poet, by the liar, of a primordial 'identification' of the spectator and the actor, an 'implosion' of the variegated severance of the Apollonian space of light – of beings – into the primal oneness of Being, into the Dionysian. This radical transfiguration of the *individual* into the sacred space of oneness, of the All, is at the same time 'mirrored' in the radical enactment of drama, as it emerged from the primal dance and orgiastic song of the chorus. The narrative of the drama, in its *distention*, intimates the *topos* of finite existence, and, with the words of Heidegger, the threefold ecstasies of temporality. There will be no drama for Apollo, for whom the ecstasies of temporality have no meaning – he is privy to the event, symbolised by the annihilation and rebirth of his half-brother Dionysus. The tragic hero flees in the face of destiny as he or she is not a god, who cannot see all that is the case (the was, is and will be) in one moment, as a singular event. Drama – especially tragic drama – is the self-interpretation and expression of finite, ecstatic existence. This differentiation of the moment, characteristic of drama, may be said to draw its Apollonian distinctiveness and purpose from the epic of Homer and Hesiod, who, in light of Nietzsche's interpretation, cast forth the illustrious illusion so as to protect the fragility of existence from a return to Chaos, to the terrible truth of sublime existence with the beautiful narratives of gods, mortals and shades, who not only struggle, die and hunger, but are also reborn or allowed to return, or in the case of some stories, are set free, as with heroes, into the Elysian Fields.

Nevertheless, epic is not tragedy, nor is it drama, tragic drama. We could, of course, interpret the successionist unfolding of the gods, in their internecine warfare and overthrows, in the sense of the tragic – and, indeed,

we have already given credit to Hesiod and Homer for their Apollonian contribution to the birth of tragic drama and philosophy. Yet, as an artform enacted under the aspect of Apollonian individuation, and this point seems never to be even noticed – nothing ever truly dies in Homer or Hesiod – and this notion of eternity may seem to resemble the onto-theologists of the Modern era, orchestrated as an ‘entitive’ metaphysics, which – and we would be anachronistic here – is oriented to a manifold of ‘essences’ (Plato), interpreted in the sense of the later notion of ‘substance’ (Aristotle). But sometimes a great error leads to the greatest of discoveries. For if we indulge this ‘anachronism’ for a moment, we could suggest another narrative of historicity, and one that may give us another manner in which to conceive of the emergence of early Greek thought – and of its relationship with that merely Apollonian thought that was expressed by Homer and Hesiod. There is always, with readings of *The Birth of Tragedy*, an emphasis upon the necessity of the Dionysian, and that with its removal at the hands of Socrates and Euripides, the Apollonian becomes naturalized, displaced by a bloodless parody of itself – the ‘Mind’. Yet, if the Dionysian and Apollonian are the necessary artistic powers for poetic creation, we must place Nietzsche’s contention of a merely Apollonian, that is, purely ‘Greek’, era into question. Of course, we already have other reasons to question Nietzsche’s contention of a merely Apollonian Homer and Hesiod in light of Penglase’s expose of the Near Eastern ‘sources’ of Greek mytho-poetic thought and praxis. Obviously, Nietzsche offers *genealogy* and not *history* – yet, it would seem probable that it is his ‘schematization’ of the *context of emergence* is questionable, not to the extent that he fails to recognize the persistent expression of primal contradiction through the vast ‘tendencies’ of the Apolline and the Dionysian, but in that he erects a barrier between Greek Dionysians and Barbaric Dionysians. It is in this way – for this ‘reason’ – that we question Nietzsche’s variant of the ‘motif of the dawn’ – that we call into question his attempt to retrieve the ‘authenticity’ of early ‘Greek’ thought. Nietzsche himself, with his own contextualization of Homer and Hesiod amid the latter’s Five Ages of Man may justify his contention of at least a persistent rigidity in the Apollonian character of Archaic Greek *epos*, and in light of the horrific and terrible horizons of the Titanic threats to their existence, artistically projected the middle world of the Olympian Gods – as the illusion of the illusion of the dream image. Nietzsche clearly states that Dionysus is *there* – already always – in Homer and Hesiod – he laughs and dies with us, as even as each is displaced, the eternity of ‘blood’ courses across the catastrophes of an existence that is inscrutable to each and All, in which even the gods fear swift Night. For, even though we are using Greek

words in this context, Apollo and Dionysus, that to which these names refer are, for Nietzsche, artistic forces of nature herself, and which have abided, it would seem, each and all mortal creativity.

Be that as it may, for Nietzsche, the early Apollonian culture of Homer and Hesiod fabricated its 'redemptive illusion' against the 'Dionysian' – there was as yet no marriage, at least for the Greeks. Homer and Hesiod struggled against the Titanic powers of nature – the utterly terrible and threatening (the sublime) were to be held off – the *other* – chaos, disorder, death – is to be denied to preserve the 'purity' of the 'blood of life'.

Yet, despite this notion of a struggle against the other and the insurgency of lyric poetry and its clandestine relations with the *other*, we must still ask the question of the legitimacy of Nietzsche's distinction between Greek and Barbarian Dionysians – unless the barbarians are the 'Titans'. Nietzsche gives no credible gestures to his distinction – not only does he seem to rely upon dubious references to the orgiastic licentiousness of the barbarians and the play of lust and cruelty which he considers to be the real 'witches's brew', but also to that which he asserts to be a universal recognition of the beauty and superiority of the Greeks. It may be the case that Nietzsche is making a specific reference to lyric poetry as an artistic precursor to Attic tragedy, as a miraculous marriage of the Apollonian and Dionysian which, in its recognition by the Delphic Oracle itself, was capable of seducing the Doric rigidity of Homeric *epos*, to step enter into the marriage of a new art, that of tragedy. Perhaps Greece should not have let itself be seduced by the traitor within . . . one may ponder – yet, that would fly in the face of not only the Near Eastern sources of Greek mythology, but also that of the lifeworld of the Greeks in which they were children. Nevertheless, regardless of his seeming Late-Romantic rediscovery of the Greeks, it will still be possible to take Nietzsche at his word with respect to the broad horizons of the context of emergence – and, irrespective of his questionable repetition of the 'motif of the dawn' and a prioritization of a single historical culture to the exclusion of others, we may heed the *raison d'être* of his own 'objectivization' of the artistic forces of nature – (and regardless of their names in any specific creative culture, as in the case of the Babylonian Saeca, as Nietzsche mentions).

It would be strange – even though he seems to be positing a 'universal' domain for the artistic forces of the Apollonian and Dionysian, and as designated by whatever indigenous lexicon, that Nietzsche, in light of his own votive relation with Dionysus, would prescribe a limitation or discrimination on the type of Dionysian. Yet, he seems to do just this – and even with his recognition of the operations of these forces back as far as to the

Babylonians (which neither Burkert nor Penglase ever mention), his segregation of the Greek Dionysians seems to discount the art and mythology of Babylon and Sumeria (and Assyria) in a manner that seems not only far from critical, but also highly arbitrary and prejudicial. Nevertheless, and as we will see more clearly in our consideration of the post-structuralist criticisms of the 'motif of the dawn', despite Nietzsche's self-limitation to Greek tragedy, his genealogical analysis – if set free from the constraints of the motif – will permit us to lay out a context of emergence in which the indications of the Apollonian and Dionysian will come to fruition in our attempt to excavate an indigenous comprehension of early 'Greek' thought.

For, from whatever neighbourhood, Dionysian or 'Orphic' poetry is fluid, inclusive, stinking with intoxication and ecstatic communion, and music. For Nietzsche, Orphicism is 'Near Eastern', 'cyclical', concerned not with succession, but with recurrence, fertility, death and rebirth. Of course, in this context, we must, even in considering 'Orphicism' as a code word for the 'Near East', still maintain an interest in the 'Orphics', as a distinct and integral phenomenon – regardless of its reliance upon non-indigenous mythologies. The Orphics – and in this context, we may include the Dionysians – differ from Homer and Hesiod in terms of not only their respective *theogonies*, but also with respect to their notions of transformation and change (Becoming). On the one hand, the Orphics begin their theogony with Time and Necessity as a duplicitous 'First', while Hesiod begins with Chaos, or the Chasm. On the other hand, temporality unthreads, takes *place* as cyclical transmutation, thereby displacing the successionist genealogy of Apolline divinities with a Dionysian eternal recurrence of the same. The Orphics, one would imagine, held a belief in 'reincarnation' or the transmigration of the soul, regardless, of the myriad questions concerning the meaning and associated *praxis* of this doctrine, upon which Nietzsche expressed his own opinions. We will return to these questions in our consideration of Pythagoras below.<sup>6</sup> Such a circular, versus successionist, 'account' of change is the central innovation of the Dionysian, but we should be clear that the meaning of 'transmigration' is contested in light of an interpretation under the aspect of the tragic, for the usual account, a Platonistic one, suggests that transmigration, as it allows for a return to – or perhaps, a never leaving of – the divine, may be regarded, in the context of this current study, as *hubristic* from the Homeric perspective, an insurrection against the *taboo* of a necessary separation between mortals and the divine. Yet, Tragedy – and, this intimates the Orphic, Dionysian *gifts* of music and dance does seek 'identification' with a 'god', though not with a [god] of escape, but with one who also dies, Dionysus. That which is affirmed is the event of

existence, of the possibility of being, symbolized by one who eternally recurs, is reborn, as with Persephone's sojourns in the places of light and darkness.

It is in this light that we should regard the significance of the 'Orphic' and 'Orphicism', of transmigration, as articulations of the tragic myth – and not, with Cornford, of a revolution against the Homeric by an intrinsically foreign, 'Eastern' and un-Greek primitivism – or, with an interpretation which abides Plato's doctrine of metempsychosis, with its peculiar, punitive, non-tragic significance.

For – let us be clear – that which is 'Greece', in the light of the genealogy of Nietzsche, is that great artwork which was a marriage of light and darkness.

In this light, we are confronted with a vision of two opposing aesthetic forces, that of the Apollonian and Dionysian, of the image, gesture and word over against the overwhelming music of existence, of life, never controlled by the mere textures of 'rhythm'. Indeed, in light of his notion of the 'unhistorical', it would, perhaps, take an equally 'unhistorical', 'creative' act to cast into relief any 'genealogy' of such a complex art-form . . . *ad infinitum*, as irony.

## On Tragedy

Nietzsche tells us that Greek tragedy arose from the 'marriage' of these two aesthetic and cultural forms of life. In his genealogy (although I have seemingly deployed this word rather anachronistically), tragedy (the 'goat song') first arose as the chorus, as a communion which in itself threatened the *individualism* of blood kinship of Homeric, Apollonian culture. Perhaps, in negotiation with this latter power, a main character was 'posited' from out of the communion – and thus, the *dramatic* form of tragedy emerged. To our ironic lament, we can credit the wisdom that nothing *great* ever comes from either politics or bureaucracy. We can *not* conceive of the sublime art of tragedy as having arisen as the result of the 'happy thought of a single man' (Kant), or, of a 'committee'. Nietzsche illustrated the emergence of tragedy as the 'conjunction' of the Apollonian dream image from out of the Dionysian spirit of music. This emergence, in other words, is the individuation of the hero from out of the 'communion' of the chorus. That which completes the tragic movement however is the 'death' of the hero, and his or her return to the communion of music, which will, like Eurynome, give rise to yet more, *new* worlds. Or will it?

Is it possible that the great Greek *dawn* has significance *only* in its great poetic lament of the tragic character of existence? Of the uncertainty and fragility of life? That the rest was only an either/or return to the ever-present essentialism of finite, mortal metaphysics? Kant states that 'metaphysics' is the core of 'human' existence, and that it would survive, as a root, an 'all-destroying barbarism' (Titans). Yet, could this not be an indication of 'thought'? The difference between Homer and Aeschylus is clear, though each share a 'common' mythology as a constellation of reference, of an imaginative *lifeworld*, in which each may recognize this 'other' – though, it is possible that they may not have been friends – or have been the best of friends. What is the 'difference'? Homer does not go far enough for Aeschylus, he does not throw this *self*, this singular mortal into a state of panic, anxiety, flight – into insurmountable uncertainty and destruction. Homer fails to disclose the *terrible truth* of radical annihilation, disaster, mortality. He remains a 'comedian' – a 'metaphysical comedian' . . . working from a 'known' Mycenaen 'script'.

Nevertheless, the birth of tragedy did not occur overnight, but took place, according to Nietzsche, over many generations – around 200 years elapse between Aeschylus and Homer – and occurred through a war of attrition. We are given the 'picture' of Dionysus, in the first instance, as a 'barbarian' phenomenon, the character of which tended to exceed all limits. But, with each home-ly, 'Greek' eruption of the Dionysian, there were responses from the Doric, Apollonian establishment, tending toward a further 'rigidification'. Yet, it is with the phenomenon of a lyric Apollo (exposed in light of the 'event', as a mask of Dionysus), of the lyrical expression of musical existence, of *pathos*, desire, or as we have intimated in the previous chapter, of this shattering individuation, a singularization so intense that the very seat of 'order' itself began to undergo fragmentation – it was here, with our Archilochus and Sappho, that the resistance of Apollo is transfigured into a retrieval of the kinship of half-brothers, and the syncretic, myriad effusion of tragic drama, of a radical singularization of this hero, of the birth of the Apollonian lyrical dream image from the utter depths of Dionysian 'communion', of music. It becomes a drama of coincidence, of the marriage of the artistic forces of creation and destruction, the fragmentation of the dream image as the fulfilment of the Dionysiac Fate (*Moirai*) of the Tragic Hero – a return to primal oneness, this life amid its event of emergence, and destruction, *this* affirmation, not only of the radical finitude of existence, but also, of the uncertainty of all poetic constructs.

Tragedy narrates and disseminates destruction, of the self, people and the state – even of the world, *Kosmos*, itself. It calls us to return to the



*conscience*, the 'remembrance' of our finite being, of our utter and insurmountable mortality. Yet, at its heart, it also summons our thought of Being, of the eternal recurrence of Becoming, and of its innocence. For, we must not simply get lost in the judicious labyrinths of meagre souls, but, open ourselves amidst the *topos* of disclosure, of light and darkness, clearing, unconcealment of the *place* of existence. This is the howl of laughter that laughs even amid annihilation, tragic laughter that destroys the conceits of 'our' *heroes*, our 'leaders' – *thrown* as 'they' are amid the *doggerel* of 'leaks', as 'we' all and each are, suffocated in a disintegrating echo-chamber, a 'prison' to which one is captive only if, and as long as, she or he believes in the prison, listens to the echoes.

### On the Death of Tragedy

Dionysus is the Lion – in our current situation – who calls for us to rebel. Yet, he is also the Camel and the Child. He is death, creativity (*eros*) and rebellion. In this respect, and in light of Penglase's and Burkert's work, we could suggest that tragedy, as with the latter's thesis of an 'orientalizing revolution' of Greek art and culture, that the indigenous Apollonian tapestry of Homeric and Hesiodic mytho-*poiesis* (even though much earlier derived from the Near East) was re-engaged by novel expressions of 'Oriental' mytho-poetics, in the form of Orphic and Dionysian mystery religions centred upon the eternal recurrence of the fertility and eroticism of life. It was this strange encounter between half-brothers which allowed for a creative synergy between the successionistic, individualistic constellations of Homer and Hesiod, on one hand, and the cyclical, communal and primordial musicality of the Dionysian, on the other.

Nietzsche contends that Euripides, under the fatal influence of an ironic, scientific 'optimism – in the person of the 'dialectician' Socrates (the 'theoretical man') – abruptly pushed music – and the destructive power of the Dionysian – out of tragedy – to 'be' followed by poetry itself. Indeed, the hyper-illusion of Socrates destroyed the very **point** of tragedy, and of poetry itself – the uncertainty of life, certainty of death, the re-birth of the All amidst the 'eternal recurrence of the same' – indeed, such an expulsion of the Dionysian, of poetry, annuls the very possibility of philosophy in the tragic age, of tragic thought. With the suppression of the Dionysian, the intrinsically surrealist, Apollonian love of beauty is transformed into the *intellectual* drive toward 'order', as typified by the 'Alexandrian man'. Nietzsche claims that this debasement of both the Apollonian (beauty in



the gaze) and the Dionysian (orgiastic musical dance and effusion) – and, hence, of the ‘body’ (‘blood’ and ‘flesh’). In other words, the denial of perspective and, hence, of life and *physical* that is the character of Platonism was a prelude to the emergence of Christianity, which he called in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* . . . ‘platonism for the people’. It is the bureaucratic, the merely theoretical appropriation of the power of direction however that – contrary to their own intentions – leads us to the abyss, to the brink of extinction. Yet, it seems that is perhaps what they desired all along.

## Chapter 4

### *Aletheia* and Being – Heidegger *contra* Nietzsche

Heidegger's incessant mediations upon the early Greeks can be read in many ways – in this current study, these mediations will be disclosed as threads weaving a deconstruction of Nietzsche. Indeed, the most recurrent motif of Heidegger's excavation, interpretation and appropriation of early Greek thinking is that of Nietzsche – whom he dubs, as we have seen, the 'discoverer of the Greeks'. Of course, Heidegger does indicate many other writers and philosophers in this context, particularly Kant, Hegel, Lessing, Schelling, Spengler (a pale-Nietzschean) and, of course, Hölderlin (though it not clear if Heidegger was fully aware of the tragic commitment of Hölderlin, in light of his work on Empedocles). Yet, it seems that Nietzsche holds a special, higher place than others in terms of not only Heidegger's echoes of various Nietzschean thematics, such as 'errancy', in the essay on the Anaximander Fragment, but also in his brash (though often subliminal) dismissals of Nietzsche. Indeed, his very echoes of Nietzsche's trope of errancy in itself could be read as another dismissal – perhaps the *arche*-dismissal of Nietzsche, in light of Heidegger's equivocation of *errancy* with the history of Being, which as we will fathom from Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, concludes with the Nietzschean *will-to-power* – itself a favourite target of Heidegger, especially in his lecture course, *Parmenides*, from 1942–1943. While there may be obvious political reasons for his dismissal of Nietzsche, it is clear that, even if Nietzsche is ultimately 'innocent', some of his various touchtones – even the Dionysian – are susceptible to bio-logist and racist glosses, opinions in which Heidegger *never* indulged.

Yet, before we delve into his full-blown criticisms of Nietzsche (and their possible *blow-back*, which will be the topic of the next chapter), who it must be said has been always Heidegger's bane and perhaps envy, and, despite his own radical dependency upon the former's *untimely* works, it would be appropriate to have a glance at a few indicative statements which expose his hermeneutical orientation with respect to his engagement with early Greek

thinking. We have already made reference to Nietzsche's trope of 'errancy', which, articulated in 1946, would clearly be an echo of his own lectures on (and vast statements and allusions) to Nietzsche after the 'turn' (*Kehre*). We have also intimated, moreover, his pre-infra-post-war expressions of condemnation of the Nazi *perversion* of the 'authentic' thought of Nietzsche in the hands of those such as Alfred Bäumler and Rosenberg, who had destroyed any possibility for a Nietzsche 'reception' in the Anglophone 'world' from nearly the beginning of the First World War (when Nietzsche Society's and anything 'German' went rapidly out of favour, including German-speaking families in America) until Walter Kaufmann's *untimely* intervention *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ* from 1950. At the same time, despite his *obvious* reliance upon Nietzschean 'innovations' along his path as a thinker, Heidegger never strayed from an 'interpretation' of 'Nietzsche' as the 'last metaphysician' of so-called 'Western' metaphysics (perhaps, at the end of the day, he was too influenced by 'Hegel', which leads to the *Holzweg* of the *closure of metaphysics* in Derrida). Heidegger remains *consistent*, when even in other works such as 'The Word of Nietzsche: God Is Dead'<sup>1</sup> and 'What Is Called Thinking?'<sup>2</sup>, he remains steadfast in his depiction of Nietzsche as a 'metaphysical' philosopher of the Will (of any philosopher of 'desire' from Plato to the 'present', *beyond the grave* – Heidegger is a *ghost*).

Heidegger's attack on this score is particularly unsatisfying in its silence with respect to Nietzschean 'poetics' – and to the deconstructive implications of Nietzsche's sense of truth amid his poetic strategy. For instance, Nietzsche does use the phrase *will-to-power*, but in what sense are we to understand this trope in light of Nietzsche's essay on 'Truth and Lying' or in light of the fact that Nietzsche calls the will a 'fiction', an invention? It would seem that Heidegger would have been aware of such possibilities in light of his trope of 'errancy' – and to the lying nature of 'truth' – lying according to an agreed convention. Can we instead read Nietzsche's thought as a practise of tragic irony? Justified as an aesthetic phenomenon, as poetic thought under the sign of the Dionysian?

This is not to say, of course, that Heidegger did not have the occasion to meditate upon Nietzschean poetic thematics – yet, as we have intimated with respect to Nietzsche's musico-poetic attempt to overcome the nihilism of 'theoretical man', Heidegger never seems to give Nietzsche 'leeway', or a playspace (*Spielraum*), for an expression of his thought, and with the understanding of the poetics of his expression as *the* primal core of his thoughts – *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was written for the purpose of overcoming 'scientific optimism', for instance, by means of a symphonically

‘structured’ mytho-poetic work. Of course, it is not that Heidegger is unaware of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as this work possessed a totemic hold on him not only with respect to the ‘death of God’, but also the ‘eternal recurrence of the same’, not to mention other thematics. He dwelled *with* Nietzsche across myriad pathways, upon a topography of references, from prior to *Being and Time* (unstated reference in *History of the Concept of Time*), to his essay, ‘The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead’, *Contributions to Philosophy* (1937–1938), ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ (1936), and his *Parmenides* (1942–1943), to name a few. That is to say, though – and only – that Heidegger was deeply aware of and concerned with the works of Nietzsche, ‘poetical’ and prose. The question must be asked, ‘Why did Heidegger not treat Nietzsche in the same way as he does Hölderlin – as a poet, or even better as a poet-philosopher – a ‘thinker’ in the sense of early Greek thinking? Is it possible that Nietzsche is a better ‘friend’ – always give your ‘best’ friend your ‘hardest cot’? Or, an enemy who is kept close by, as the *next one*. Or – the *unsaid* unsaid? What ‘issue’ does Heidegger have with Nietzsche?

Could the issue be petty? Is it Nietzsche’s ‘protestant’ recklessness? The fact that he was not from Swabia, and did not particularly like ‘Germany’? His rhetorical gregariousness, his utter individuality of ‘style’? That he liked the ‘French’ and turned against Wagner? No, it is unlikely that the issue *is* petty, that Heidegger ceaselessly *typified* Nietzsche and denied to him his ‘grand style’ – not to mention the *arche*-motif of the Dionysian. There are *many* who are not particularly fond of Heidegger’s critique of Nietzsche. Yet, it is necessary for us to comprehend this critique in a manner which transcends the mere repetition of Heidegger’s charge that Nietzsche is the ‘last metaphysician’. My defence of Nietzsche on ‘stylistic’ and ‘aesthetic’ grounds may hold no weight for Heidegger, for he may declare that Nietzsche, in his published and unpublished works (such as *The Will to Power*), not only made many overt ‘metaphysical’ statements, but also oriented his own positions ‘against’ those ‘positions’ of differing metaphysical standpoints – a ‘for’ and ‘against’ which orchestrates, whether one has a will to one or not – a *metaphysical* meta-*topos* of systems and anti-systems. Nietzsche, of course, could respond to Heidegger that the ‘*destruktion* of the history of ontology’ is another *form* of the ‘against’. Heidegger would immediately disagree with Nietzsche – *destruktion* is not destruction – there is no ‘against’, but, on the contrary, an attempt to retrieve the *originary* impetus of thought, long decayed, covered over and concealed by a ‘metaphysical system’. It is the task of *destruktion* to set free the original impetus for thought. We could imagine, if we can take a step back from our prosaic

discourse for the moment, a dialogue between Nietzsche and Heidegger, one that would allow the interactive expression of a 'language game' to *guide* the development and disclosure of thought:

**Nietzsche** – Yet, that is my task as well, to retrieve the abyss of life from underneath the layer of metaphysics, of nihilism – what is the difference between us; you, too, speak of the epoch of metaphysics which begins with Plato, descending into Christianity and the Moderns?

**Heidegger** – Yes, I will admit it, you led the way – but, I believe you have put yourself in the way – made yourself into a 'personality', with all of the drama connected to it – philosophical drama, the worst drama. I have myself become a 'personality', and no one listens to my thoughts any longer – it is all just 'idle chatter' and 'gossip'.

**Nietzsche** – But, I believe in the self; it is the greatest of our sins, the self as the great body of the Dionysian affirmation of the world.

**Heidegger** – But with the penetration of your self – and so much of yourself – into your work, you deflect from the chance that the truth of Being will be disclosed, not merely a 'history' of Being, one which is merely the tabloid of the 'Mind'. There must be a distinction between a thinker and a poet; they are two different beings.

**Nietzsche** – Why? Do you really believe this, in this severance? Look at the early Greeks in the tragic age . . . these were poet-philosophers.

**Heidegger** – Yes . . . *they* were, but *we are not*, and perhaps never will be . . .

**Nietzsche** – But, I know this – I grasp what you say – I have these same bitter thoughts, of the Nothing of which Hölderlin speaks in *Hyperion*. Yet, I have also spoken of the affirmation of the eternal recurrence of the same, and of the overcoming of nihilism in convalescence –

**Heidegger** – Yes – yes – I hear *you* now, as if for the first time. That is exactly your problem! You think that you can change – transfigure the primordial situation of existence via an act of the Will – by merely *choosing* to overcome nihilism. Is it not strange that Zarathustra seems to be quite alone – at least of other human mortals in the finale of 'The Sign' – a sign to whom, to the None, as distinct from the All? Is this the recent babble of tabloids about the 'Death of Zarathustra'? Where is the Dionysian 'communion', 'chorus'?

**Nietzsche** – I am honoured that you have read my work so intensively – yet, you have not read me so well – and, I admit I left Zarathustra in a spectacularly enigmatic situation – but, I do not blame anyone who wishes to explore the fateful 'death of Zarathustra'. However, my intentions are completely different from your scenario and assertions as to the 'meaning' of my 'work'.

**Heidegger** – You say it again – *your intentions* . . . as if you can ‘choose’ . . . this is what makes you a ‘Modernist’ . . . and, the last of the ‘metaphysicians’ . . .

**Nietzsche** – Are we, am I, not free? Do we, I, not have a self? To create, resist, transfigure the ‘world’ through art, poetry and music – festivals, ecstatic insights – and – the *deed!*?

**Heidegger** – Yes – but No – (becomes silent)

**Nietzsche** – Will you leave me, with nothing but ambiguity and silence?

**Heidegger** – (silent, then in a whisper) I have also been in errancy . . .

### The *Destruktion* of Modernity

The primary and consistent focus of Heidegger’s critical engagement of Nietzsche is that of the question of the ‘authenticity’ of Nietzsche’s interpretation of the early Greeks – and, hence, as we will see in the next section, of Nietzsche’s relationship with thought, or of being in the truth, *aletheia*. Despite the obvious dependency of Heidegger upon Nietzsche’s genealogy of the trajectories of Greek ‘history’ – not only upon *The Genealogy of Morals*, but also, *The Birth of Tragedy* (as the cipher for *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greek*), and, of course, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *The Will to Power*, it has become clear that Heidegger regards Nietzsche’s work as inadequate, as problematic for some *reason*. Heidegger charges, on the one hand, that Nietzsche’s work is exemplary of errancy in light of his consummation of the ‘history of Being’, the epoch of metaphysics. This charge implicates Nietzsche within the paradigmatic horizons of Platonism, even if only in the negative. The second charge against Nietzsche is that of ‘Modernism’, regarded by Heidegger as the *fleur du mal* of the history of Being. This charge implicates Nietzsche and the ‘subject of modernity’ within the trajectory of European nihilism – as the Platonistic and Christian denial of the tragic for ‘individuality’ – the mask of an Apollo who no longer knows his half-brother Dionysus. In this sense, the subject of ‘Modernity’ is merely the latest re-branding of the soul, ‘consciousness’, as that which extricates itself from the ambiguous – radically mortal – horizons of the tragic. The ‘self’ in Nietzsche – exhibited in his own performative *corpus* – is the latest expression of the ‘soul superstition’ in its quest for the eternal – in his own case, in the ‘Vision and the Riddle’ of the *eternal recurrence of the Same*. As we have intimated earlier, this reading of ‘Nietzsche’ and his relationship to the historicity of the ‘West’ is ironic in light of, again, the clear *parasitism* of Heidegger’s interpretation upon Nietzsche’s own articulations of the trajectory of ‘Western’ history.

It would perhaps be justifiable to simply lose patience with Heidegger and reject his reading as merely another violent imposition upon Nietzsche of an external 'grand narrative' which has little to do with Nietzsche – and which is intellectually *dishonest* in its unacknowledged appropriations of crucial 'Nietzschean' insights. For, as I have argued in 'The Wreckage of Stars: Nietzsche and the Ecstasy of Poetry'<sup>3</sup>, Nietzsche is well aware of his epochal 'sickness', of his own dilemma of having been the child of his times. The 'context of emergence' for his philosophical orientation is *of course* that of Modernism, an ideological nexus which was the overripe fruit of the 'theoretical man', of the Socratic and Christian optimism that is the deceptive mask of nihilism. In this light, Nietzsche's task was not only one which would seek to raze the house in which he was born – 'Modernity' – but also to destroy overcome the Platonistic denial of the Dionysian root of life, creativity and thought. The pre-platonic philosophers, Nietzsche insists, show us that poet-philosophers such as these are possible, that such philosophers may be possible again in the (perhaps *near*) future. This is, of course, the purpose of Nietzsche's attempt to conjure forth the 'personalities' of the early Greek thinkers – to conjure forth living, breathing apparitions of such creative thinkers – as an incitement to *ourselves* to 'act'. We can obviously agree with Heidegger that the material of this portrayal was 'commonplace' – yet, we can also be grateful to Nietzsche for his diabolic necromancy – an *antidote* to the dusty oblivion of philological entropy and museumification. Nevertheless, the question recurs – 'what' is it about Nietzsche's 'modernist' approach to the 'pre-platonic philosophers' that stands in the way of an accord with Heidegger – again – why is Nietzsche not treated as was Hölderlin?

To cut to the chase, we could perhaps suggest that Nietzsche's 'modernism' and his 'metaphysical' pedigree is exhibited in his philosophical engagement with personalities as such – with his very participation in the language game of the epoch – of course, he takes so many to task – yet, such – a *dance of personalities* – of Plato, St Augustine, Martin Luther, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Kant, Stendhal, or any of the long list of internecine references and loves – orients itself in the discourse of metaphysics in the sense of 'onto-theology' and of an 'ethics of agency' and action. In this light, even though Nietzsche is destructively critical of various positions and even constructs a meta-schematic of trajectories and pathways of decadence, he still remains within the game, within the house – he does not really burn it down, he does not light the fuse of his dynamite. Nietzsche could assert that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was the beginning of an explosion and implosion of the epoch of nihilism – of the overcoming of the *theoretical man*, and thus,

of metaphysics. The question is whether or not Nietzsche's masterwork of *poetic philosophy* – *poetic thought* – accomplished its task. Some – missing the 'hidden' meaning of my question – may assert that it is too soon to ascertain the impact of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and, thus, it would be impossible to answer the question of its 'effectivity'. This is a complex indication with many implications. As we know from Kant, reason can have no *direct action* upon the phenomenal world – that *topos* whose jurisdiction is that of sensibility, reproductive imagination and understanding (indicated through reflective consciousness from the unity of experience via thought). Reason, as we will recall, regulates the understanding in its *enaction* of conceptual totalities, but also can determine the Will directly in the context of its *valuative*, practical significance and 'application'. Yet, it is the true sublimity of reason that it seeks the ever higher unity, that ever broader context, that All of its deepest aspirations and perplexity. Perhaps, the question is that of the Modern 'version' of 'freedom', with its (rather Kantian) emphasis upon 'rational choice', 'action', and 'values'. In this story, Nietzsche, with his 'Revaluation of All Values', becomes a deranged neo-Kantian, or as J. M. Bernstein quipped once in a seminar, a 'pulverised Kant' – but still a 'Kantian', a 'Platonist', a 'metaphysician', still 'Western'. The problem with Nietzsche is his *faith* in the *agent* of action (the self as *ethos*), of knowledge (the scientist), and of creativity (the artist) – with the *proviso* that the first two types can be 'reduced' to the third and last, the artist.

Indeed, the picture that is being painted is that of a 'modernist', 'subjectivist', 'voluntarist' Nietzsche. Nietzsche as a 'radical' neo-Kantian – a Tragic Kant – one who is read (for the wrong reasons) even by the Vienna Circle. We could, of course, pursue this thread of 'historical' thought, and such pursuits would be most fruitful. However, in light of our exploration of Heidegger's *picture* of Nietzsche, that which is becoming 'clear' is the 'why' – Nietzsche is not honest. He tells us that he loves Fate, and counsels us to do so, as well – yet, he counsels action, implies that we can transfigure the world, convalesce, and that he himself creates – Nietzsche seeks to revalue values. What is the problem with this? Even with the deepest reading of the eternal recurrence of the same, there is still the abysmal freedom of the *rest of the story*. As we can learn from Schürmann, an epochal economy disseminates 'internal relations' which abide in themselves not only the phantasm of a 'system', but also the negativity of the 'breach'. Of course, we cannot jump over our own shadow, and we are 'constrained' by context – though one that is tragically 'makeshift'. Of course, we can 'act' – and do 'act' – yet, it is not action that defines epochs. Action, knowledge, aesthetics – these are intra-epochal agencies – subsist within an 'epoch', though each and all



of these may invoke a 'passage' that conjures an 'event' of transfiguration of existence. However, for Heidegger, such a 'faith' in action, in light of the discourse of a 'revaluation of values', indicates the *hubris* of subjectivism, one that cuts across the prevalent disclosure of the history of Being, metaphysics, errancy, in light of its 'developmental' 'phases' and 'typologies'. Nietzsche asserts that *the deed is all* – that it is possible to witness the personalities of possible biographies – and to act accordingly. Heidegger states in 'The Turning'<sup>4</sup> that we can diagnose the problematic of 'technology', but that we can never *strike it down* – it is a *dispensation* of Being that we cannot master. It 'is' clear though that mortals, humans, have a necessary role to play with respect to the vision of a new epoch that is not a 'system' constituted as the architectonic of an *arche*, but as a *topos* of the Open – as the setting-free, letting be (*Gelassenheit*) of finite existence. We 'become' the poets, thinkers and artists [who] – anonymously – merely as 'formal indications', *topoi* – sustain and innovate the 'world', the 'house of Being' – the linguistic–noetic–aesthetic nexus. The question is of an *honest* apprehension of mortality – though, this is 'clear' to Nietzsche – yet, death in light of the Dionysian is only tragic death, the shedding of the Apollonian mask, one that merely conceals the eternity of erotic *physis*.

The difficulty lies however in the task that is set – that of overcoming 'nihilism'. Nietzsche already analyses nihilism as an epochal state of affairs – and admits that he is *sick* – does Heidegger's question relate to the assertion in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that an 'affirmation' may be capable of 'convalescence' and, thus, 'health' – and that this is a project that can be undertaken by the individual – by the self? In other words, to assert that the problem of existence can be *solved* through actions amid the facticity of dispersion is to *forget* the existence is not a 'problem', but a 'certainty' – not as a 'fact' that is 'eternal' – as a 'substance', but as a finite predicament and 'tomb' – as the *truly* tragic. Or, perhaps, Nietzsche remains, for Heidegger, *Zarathustra's Ape*, one who can only condemn and whose 'affirmation' is plastic, posture, a simulacrum – and an attempt to flee in the face of the tragic with the mythology of a rebirth of the tragic. Like 'Marxists' who defer revolution via their incessant discourse of revolution, as a *future* 'event', *why not now?* For Heidegger – tragedy does not need to be 'reborn' as it is always already the persisting 'natality' of mortal existence. The radical temporality of *thrown* existence is the 'truth of Being' – 'we' are fatefully thrown from Being as beings. We emerge as beings, Being withdraws, as with Empedocles, with his *poiesis* of *Love* and *Strife*, a poet whom Heidegger does not regard as a 'primordial thinker' – as he does with Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides. It is not at all clear *why* Heidegger makes his

certain decisions, however, we will return to this question in the next chapter, with an intimation of Krell's *The Tragic Absolute*,<sup>5</sup> where he lays out this much neglected chiasmus of Hölderlin and Empedocles.

The question is that of differing worlds and *conflict* between worlds, with regards to the current question, of Openness to fate versus merely subjective hegemonies. Heidegger is being consistent in this context since this is the same charge he made (just after his *own* liberation from the Nazi 'state') in his 'Letter on Humanism', in response to Sartre's, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' – which was also published as *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. Perhaps – Heidegger radically *misunderstands* Nietzsche. Nevertheless, if we delve into the context of Heidegger's own reception of Nietzsche, in light of the latter's overwhelming influence upon Europe – upon European, American and world art, culture and politics until the present time – we could simply suggest, again, that Nietzsche's *personality* gets in the way of 'truth'. It is clear, however, that Heidegger speaks, in his 'Anaximander Fragment', of the 'artist' and, indeed, of the 'tragic artist'. As we learn from Nietzsche, tragic art is a *dance* of 'music' and 'personality' (the 'tragic hero') – it is the 'event' of finite 'ipseity' (Bataille) in an 'eruption' from out of 'communion' – and, its inexorable return and recurrence amidst the Same. Yet, as we can ascertain, Heidegger's reception of 'Nietzsche' is *over-determined* by politics and art, and this *horror* of 'history of the present'. Heidegger is a 'meterologist' of complexity, 'over-determination' – discerning this concealing of the 'event' under these waves of 'lies'.

Of course, this is unfair to Heidegger, as he, despite being shattered by 'Nietzsche' in 1924, enacted a *subversive* posture to Nazi 'scholarship' from 1934–1945.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, he is attempting to justify himself [of course, the *silence* introduces another paradigm] – but, it is clear that he incessantly interrogated and condemned in his *Parmenides* the *imperium* of mere command and the *utter inferiority* of racial, biological, linguistic, ethnic, etc., politics, not to mention the merely governmental, bureaucratic, meta-political character of the 'prostitution' of '*applied* philosophies'. Heidegger exalted thought – the thought of Being – thought is its own *praxis* amid 'world' and 'earth'. Yet, it is *thought* – and not *mere* action . . . although thought has its own 'action', *praxis* – yet, this act is that of setting-free, dismantling the Copernican self, letting beings be and *not be*. It may seem that Heidegger's indication of clearing is perhaps the place where he parts ways with Nietzsche. For Heidegger, Nietzsche is late, very timely, indeed, is the culmination of 'Western' metaphysics. The 'West' itself, as the land of evening, is nearly at its own existential end – for Heidegger does not specify the 'West' as one would an advocate, or even as a statement that this is *his* 'house of Being'.

Echoing Nietzsche's own genealogy of European nihilism, Heidegger speaks of an epoch at its end – and it is this death which we should welcome as we await the event of a new beginning, a novel dispensation of Being, a second epoch of its 'History'. Nietzsche, in his Stoicism, it would seem, with his notion of an eternal recurrence, clings onto all that which has been, in all of its crooked wanderings, and affirms all of this vast interconnexion – for his one moment of joy. Yet, for Heidegger, and this is clear in all of his lectures and writings on the early Greeks, it may not be necessary to affirm each and all – think of Parmenides, as an example, to whom was revealed the two pathways, that of Truth and the thinking of mortals, mortal knowing, in which we are infected with the grammar and aspect of the 'nothing'. This indication, whether it is read in terms of the *ontological difference*, or of *Ereignis*, as the event of appropriate and enowning, would perhaps lead Heidegger to argue that Nietzsche did not make a credible statement upon Being, beyond that of his excessively subjectivist dithyrambs of Being as the 'I' in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, or as the bloodless fiction over against a radical innocence of becoming in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Twilight of the Idols* – it was through a blindness to Being that Nietzsche became mired in his wanderings amidst the ontical realm of facticity. In this way, Heidegger can further argue that this utter dispersion of wanderings, of the genealogies of facticity, expressed in the labyrinth of aphorisms and poetry, had become *de facto* coordinated by a traditional – since it was never seriously questioned – doctrine of Being and of the traditional architectonic of metaphysical organization. Indeed, it is possible that Heidegger approaches Nietzsche in this way – taking revenge, perhaps, for his quip (following Hölderlin) that Being is the emptiest of fictions. Heidegger not only states that Nietzsche has a thoroughly Roman understanding of the Greeks, that his thinking and writing is thoroughly in the *Latin* tradition, but moreover that Nietzsche never had any inkling of *aletheia*, as the interplay between unconcealment and concealment, amid an event of truth expressed in *Muthos* as the primordial words of Being.

Nietzsche, though his work has been irreplaceable for Heidegger, is condemned to the land of evening, ultimately, he becomes what he was, what he had attacked – a *decadent, very decadent* Late Romantic – who focuses merely upon *personality* – when it is Being that must be the only issue. The 'West' must and will die, Heidegger *perhaps* would say – yet, it is clear that Nietzsche did not make it fall faster, but sought instead to be its next saviour with his religion of the self, doctrine of eternal recurrence and the ethical *praxis* of affirmation – with his methodology of 'health' and his notions of the will-to-power, *amor fati*, with his 'death of God' and his *übermensch* ('Thus, I willed

it!) – his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which for Heidegger (and for Marx), may be merely the latest lexicon of the idol amid the ontic agora of commodity fetish, of deflections, distractions from the truth of Being. Nietzsche is merely a repetition – Heidegger *may* say thinking of Kierkegaard – Nietzsche is not a primordial thinker, but is a madman wandering, lost in the dispersion of facticity – ironically one who serves – as with several of the early German romantics, to merely shoot arrows at princes, to repeat not only modernist, but also metaphysical, Platonistic protocols, consummating these norms in their very revaluation.

We could imagine the preceding as one plausible reading of Heidegger's stance toward Nietzsche. While it does serve to give us an 'answer', to fill in the void of our earlier questions and is based upon incidental statements made by Heidegger about Nietzsche in his lectures on Anaximander, Parmenides and Heraclitus, the reading is extreme as it violently precludes not only an interaction of more depth between Heidegger and Nietzsche, but also fails to take into account, once again, the massive question of Heidegger's discourse upon 'Nietzsche' in the context of the *ideological struggle* within the Nazi *intelligentia*.

Nevertheless, while the latter topic would require an entire work for its consideration, the former topic may be fruitfully explored within the parameters of our current study. For it would seem that Heidegger's engagement with Nietzsche was longstanding and was excellent food for thought. Moreover, it is possible that, for Heidegger, there is a hidden Nietzsche, as with the Nietzsche (and the Heidegger) of the post-structuralists, one that cannot be 'useful to fascism', exploited by the likes of the Nazi Bäumler. It is the 'Nietzsche' of meta-poetic horizons and *topoi*, who is *already always* a poet of Being and Becoming.

To this extent, I would like to consummate this chapter with a discussion of the interface between Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and Heidegger's indication of 'Truth' as *Aletheia* in his work on Parmenides. Nevertheless, we cannot expect a ready embrace of Nietzsche by Heidegger, at least on the surface – though, there persists the question that we ourselves are compelled to ask, and which we will pursue amidst the *death of the author*.

### From Dionysus and Apollo to *Aletheia*

It is clear that 'mythology' can be problematic. *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* . . . do I need to say more? Alfred Rosenberg . . . Adorno on poetry . . . Jean Luc-Nancy on *mythos* – Heidegger is not far away from these

sentiments – to recall – philosophy does not arise out of mythology, but is expressed in the primordial words of *Muthos*. Nietzsche – never an inkling of *aletheia*, a Latin understanding of the ‘Greeks’, a modernist and last of the metaphysicians. Heidegger does not wish to resurrect the Teutonic gods. Nor, in the spirit even of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, does he wish to resurrect any gods, to enact the ‘Ass Festival’. Yet, he does just that – with *Aletheia* – if Dionysus and Apollo will be a problem, then why repeat the same procedure (and its *stipulative* regulations) with *Aletheia*? Is this hypocrisy? Logical contradiction, beyond laughter . . .

Of course, the short answer could be that the aesthetic forces of the Dionysian and of the Apollonian refer to an ‘ontic’ onto-polytheology, but *Aletheia* intimates Being, a clearing of Being (and of beings) as an ‘event’ (*epoche*), the ‘ontological’. Perhaps, it is a ‘difference’ that is only stable when it is divorced from temporality. Yet, that is the ‘Apollonian’ illusion. Annihilation is the destination of Fate . . . the Dionysian, the No-thing. Perhaps, a better way would be to bring Heidegger and Nietzsche into honest dialogue about their differences, but we have already tried that – for after all, the crucial, pressing issue is not about Heidegger or Nietzsche, but of an indigenous understanding, this ironic hermeneutics of self-interpretation of early ‘Greek’ thought – of mortal existence, which is the meditation of philosophy.

As distinct from his own indication of *Aletheia*, Heidegger in his *Parmenides* places a question over Nietzsche’s conception of the Dionysian, in a very brief aside. Yet, Heidegger does not return to his pregnant suggestion – nor, does he elaborate upon *The Birth of Tragedy* in any of his texts on early Greek thought. This would seem to be, at the very least, a glaring omission with regards to not only an interpretation of Nietzsche and the Greeks, but also, of the early Greeks themselves. For, as we have intimated, there would appear to be a distinct correlation or even a mapping of the Nietzschean diagnosis of the epoch of the ‘theoretical’ man, of the nihilism of Socratic optimism, and Heidegger’s own specification of the history of Being, of the epoch of ‘metaphysics’ with the onset of Plato. Of course, as we suggested earlier, the difference could consist in Nietzsche’s quest, in the *Birth of Tragedy*, for rebirth, as the guiding motif of a tragic Dionysus would intimate. Heidegger would not seem to be interested in a rebirth of tragedy, in terms of the mytho-poetic symbol of Dionysus – although no where does Heidegger seem to make his position clear on this issue, but of the retrieval of the thought of Being, of *aletheia*, of the harbingering of an ‘event’ that would clear away the un-worlded and ontic expressivity which persists only to conceal, in the sense of *pseudos*, as this openness of the unconcealment

of Being. In this light, perhaps the very indication of *aletheia* consists in the attempt to suggest an indication that would disrupt our usual readings (such as Derrida's motif of 'differance') and allow, in its dedicated submission, for the self-disclosure of the phenomenon, of Being. For after all, as we have seen, Heidegger's denies a ground of philosophy in mythology – philosophy did not arise from mythology, and its primal meaning cannot be discerned through a reading of mythology.

In this way, Heidegger would not endorse our reading of the emergence of early Greek thought from amidst a conflictual horizon of mytho-poetic narratives – or, perhaps, this reading tells us nothing about thought, or of Being. Nor, will Heidegger consent to the resurrection of mythologically saturated terminologies or signs which are not only over-determined, but have also a merely Latin or Roman significance. In this way, such a resurrection of epochally embedded lexicons, serves to replicate the decadent syndrome of metaphysics, which in its 'forgetfulness' of Being amidst the plethora of beings, becomes itself a mytho-poetics of nihilism, expressed as the history of Being, of *mere* errancy.

This latter reference, to errancy, should remind us of the radicality of his own project with respect to the constraining horizons of epoch – and of the *epoche*, the clearing, that is an event of a differing dispensation of Being. It is not *for us* to *act* – the birth of a novel epoch of Being is not a matter of divining the correct methodology, as with genealogy, and to build out of this wreckage a rebirth, a new world from out of the dust of an historical culture. Nor can we re-activate the power of once great powers – beyond even the gods. On the contrary, it is not *for us* to *act* so as to found a *new world order*. Our blind faith in the very possibility of such an act would be, for Heidegger, merely a repetition of modernist subjectivism, which, in his epochal analysis, is the *penultimate* fulfilment of the epoch. As we have suggested, the ultimate event of an epoch is, as with anything mortal, its death – the loss of its world. In this way, in response to our earlier question, Heidegger is not merely echoing Hegel's 'optimistic' epochal schematism with regards to the triumphalism of the 'Western.' Again – the 'West' – as the land of evening, is nothing enlightened, certainly not the *übermensch*, though, it may see itself in this perverse, caricatured mirror. The 'field' must be cleared if there is to arise a novel dispensation of Being – but, while we may, in our recklessness, seek to act to clear the field for ourselves in acts such as the 'destruction of the history of ontology', 'genealogy' or even deconstruction – in method – such 'acts' will have significance only in the conjuration of remembrance of Being amid the ontological difference of Being and beings. Indeed, it is clear that these philosophical methods, as

with the works of poets and writers, build the house of Being – but yet, still as thrown vis-à-vis the dispensation of Being. The primordial artwork in the prevailing era is either one which provokes remembrance of Being with the intimation of a radically *new beginning*, or intimates that the epoch is nearing the death of its own reign, to become yet another broken hegemony upon the field of agonistic, Kosmic existence. It is clear that Nietzsche fulfils the latter task of the artist, but it is unclear with regards the former. For, as Heidegger contends, Nietzsche has asserted an ontology – and without any evidence – a symbolism of this ontology in Attic tragedy. Yet, such a mytho-philosophical projection is merely a creature of the surface, it does not go into the depths, into Being – it remains in the realm, as with Parmenides, of mortal knowing, one which ‘infects’ the well-rounded truth of Being with ‘nothingness’ so as to express the narratives of transfiguration, of becoming. Or, in other words, this admixture gives rise to a concern for beings, there arising and fading, of the drama of existence. To return to a previous mythological constellation is merely an Ass Festival, even if it is the ‘act’ of one with the best of intentions. Heidegger contends that, if Nietzsche, even if his notion of the Dionysian is meaningful, has no ‘inkling’ of *aletheia*, that his interpretation of the primordial thinkers of archaic Greece is unsound. Nietzsche is blind to the depths, and this openness of Being, of that ‘sphere’ that oscillates below mytho-poetic, mortal ‘constructions’ (each people has its law tablets with signify its overcomings), which is merely an expressivity indexed to its own ‘house of Being’. Such surface poetics are merely collocations that articulate the drama (even if tragic) of mortal existence, in terms of beings – as mythologies which are not in themselves significant to thought, unless such poetic expressivity allows us, within the horizons of an indicative phenomenological hermeneutics, to remember, to recall Being, as *aletheia*. Instead of returning to the authentic depths of mortal existence as the site of thrownness and creativity amidst a dispensation Being, Nietzsche – as with Heidegger’s ‘criticisms’ of Husserl – returns to an established mythological horizon and narrative lexicon. Such a return annihilates the event of Being in its novel dispensation, one that will inaugurate and disseminate (unbeknownst to the ‘modern subject’) the linguistic house of a novel epoché through the builders and dwellers of a new *poiesis*.

At the same time, such a portrayal does not mean that Heidegger is a futurist, forever and blindly desiring the ‘new’ – the speed of technology. Heidegger seeks not the rebirth of Greek tragedy or mythology (as with the early attempts of repetition which led to opera), but a retrieval of the moment of thought, of the thought of Being, in the ‘primordial thinkers’



of archaic Greek thought. For the covering-up of Being is not merely errancy, as *pseudos*, one that could be reversed through the proper methods of excavation of re-interpretation – it is not the fault of some subject who decided to or made a mistake – or who was even bound to make mistakes, to err. On the contrary, the concealment of truth, for Heidegger, is an aspect of the truth of Being itself, as the truth is the dispensation, the unconcealment is the opening in which the beings appear, populating the *topos* of the clearing. To this extent, these beings mask, conceal Being – yet, there persists a deeper concealment amidst a withdrawal of Being itself in an event of the dissemination of beings, the eruption of a novel epoch.

Heidegger does not seek to excavate the hidden under the *pseudo*, though there are aspects of his work which are clearly destructive in this manner. Yet, such a *methodos* seeks, with its tactic of *destruktion* a retrieval of the original *topos* for thought. On the contrary, it is necessary to retrieve the abyss which lies beneath the mytho-poetic horizons and narratives of the epoch, without however forgetting that at once both disclose traces of the dispensation of Being, but also abide a *pseudos* which transcends concealment, to sheer falsity, deception. Heidegger contends that this domain of Being, as the concealment amidst the unconcealment of beings is the original ‘Greek’ experience of Being (and beings), and is, moreover, the site, the *topos*, of tragic existence. With his ‘provocative’ readings of Anaximander, Parmenides and Heraclitus, Heidegger stakes his ‘ground’ with *that* abyss, the chasm, openness, that lies beneath *this* Dionysiac, mytho-poetic abyss of Nietzsche. Mere mythology does not give rise to philosophy or thought, so Heidegger contends. Nevertheless, this *topos* of thought, of the articulation of Being, requires its own appropriate language, this poetic articulation of a novel house of being, still under construction, incomplete. Heidegger finds such primal language in *Muthos*, in the Primordial Word, as a metontology of Being, of the language of thought *prior* to the myriad words that dance in the mytho-poetics of existence (Aeschylus, it could be said, with Cicero, was a student of Pythagoras after all, *not vice versa*). In this light, it would seem unlikely that Heidegger seeks a new mythology, articulated unknowingly by poets, artists and musicians. His care and concern seems to lie with a nearing of his thought to Being, and such a task is indicated in his contentions that the Primordial Words that ‘matter’ are those of early Greek thought are *Aletheia*, *Logos*, *Moirai* – given to Heraclitus and Parmenides – the ‘words’ themselves oriented amidst the tragic character of Anaximander, and its ultimate double bind, which for Heidegger is the *first* statement of tragedy by the *first* ‘primordial’ thinker. In this light, the ‘clearing’ appears to return us to the ‘beginnings’ in *Muthos* – as the *logos* of



Truth, of *aletheia* – and, to the chance of an ‘event’ of novel dispensation, this ‘Gift’ of an *originary* encounter with Being in its event, prior to its fall into the dispersion of beings.

*Thought*, in this light, opens as an intimation of the ‘event’ and of its *topos*, playspace (*Spielraum*) of its disclosure, and thus has need of a differing manner of expression. Yet, it is not something that is simply chosen, as with the ‘ideal language’ of Rudolf Carnap, and the scientists of the Vienna Circle, who sought to put an end, within the ‘Modernist’ paradigm of the active subject, to the ambiguities of ‘metaphysical’ and ‘historical–grammatical’ language. Such a project fails, collapses, another makeshift attempt to cure the world of its utter wildness. It may seem ironic that Heidegger shares the desire, with his fellow ‘Germans’ for a different world. Yet, there is a difference between the Vienna Circle and Heidegger in that the latter had as his task to articulate the question of Being, thereby allowing ‘novel’ expression of the truth of Being, and not merely a cleansing and purification of mytho-ontical ‘furniture’ (of a dying ‘West’). It is not in our power to decide our destiny or that of Being itself. There will be the necessity amid such limits to orient, attune ourselves to the ‘truth of Being’, and – as thinkers – to diagnose when the truth of Being, in its novel dispensation, has become merely a ‘history of Being’, a ‘history of truth’, as that which was . . . as the ‘now’, the ‘present’ sits comatose in its status of indoctrination, severed from the ecstatic play of unconcealment and concealment, amid the open playspace of originary temporality (of freedom). It is in the land of evening that we can begin to witness the end of a specific dispensation of Being.

We, damned souls, wait for god,  
 the only one who can save us now . . .  
 – though – who wants to be saved?  
 who wishes to be taken away from *this*?  
 the tragic destination of annihilation . . .

## Chapter 5

# Philosophy as Tragedy (and Comedy) – A Note on Post-structuralism

Despite Heidegger's 'Parmenidean' clarification of our predicaments, and, of the utter necessity of beginning 'anew', as indicated in his work upon the primordial thinkers of archaic Greece, there persists a 'serious' question of his relevance to an indigenous understanding and exhibition of early 'Greek' thought. For, as with Nietzsche's *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, he does not engage with most of the early Greek thinkers – though Nietzsche did not decide this 'selection', in the manner of Heidegger.

The assertion that there are primordial thinkers amid the early Greeks at first shocks us, into a 'pause' – as does the decision not to address early Greek thinking as a whole, nor its 'singular' articulations in – Anaximenes, Xenophanes, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, and the 'list' goes can go on and on . . . we wonder 'why' only these thinkers have been 'chosen' by Heidegger – Anaximander, Parmenides and Heraclitus. Of course, such a thought-laden 'decision' need not be beyond our comprehension, though other questions arise in light of this exclusion. Is Heidegger concerned with the historicity of early Greek thought? How does he 'justify' his decision as to the 'primordial thinkers'? As we have suggested, this *tragic trinity* is expressed as a chiasmus of a *limited/unlimited*, abysmal 'ground', the *topos* of *being/beings* and the *noetic* aesthetics of *becoming*, symbolized or thought, respectively, as *Moirai*, *Aletheia*, *Logos*. While we will readily admit, moreover, that Heidegger's analysis of the primordial essence of early Greek thought is illuminating, it would still seem that there is a relation of dependency with Nietzsche's discovery of the Greeks. That which would seem necessary, however, for Nietzsche's genealogy of early Greek thought and tragic poetry is a complex tracing of aesthetic forces in conflict and of their temporary convergence in a novel type of a *mixed* character. Moreover, this tracing would necessarily have to take into account mytho-poetic textures and expression as indicative of the forces at play. Such a hermeneutics of novel types as those having a 'mixed' character will

allow us to ascertain the longstanding and recurrent horizons for the emergence of tragic thought – and as these horizons undergo ‘development’ as expressed in evolving conversation of early Greek thought, from the early convergence of tragic thought in Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus, from Thales to Plato, who, for Nietzsche and Heidegger, signifies not only the end of tragic thought, but of the emergence of the novel type of the Alexandrian man, the scholar of cheerful, Socratic optimism. Of course, on the basis of this prerequisite tracing of the emergence of the philosophical ‘community’ of Western Asia Minor – and all that is to follow – it would then be possible to take into account Heidegger’s emphasis upon the primordial thinkers. Yet, we must first have a precise sense of the historicity of early Greek thought, one which not only – as with the early Heidegger – underlines the necessity of an ontic fundament, but also, with a clear recognition of the novel artistic and philosophical forms as a ‘mixed’ type. Such a perspective would underscore, in a non-anachronist manner, the vital significance of not only Homeric and Hesiodic poetics, but also the ‘Orphic’, ‘Eastern’ streams which converged into the river of tragic philosophy. It is in this way, that thought and philosophy (again, regardless of our semantics) exhibit a much longer life, existing upon diverse cultural topologies, from Greece to Babylon, and beyond. In this way, the emergence of tragic philosophy can be revisualized as a moment across a much more complex and comprehensive *topos* of human thought. It would seem that such an argument that thought is indigenous to finite, human existence would not only call into question many of the supremacist implications of the motif of the ‘dawn’, but would also allow us to engage in a hermeneutics of the mytho-poetic narratives, textures and motifs of diverse cultures, in terms of a radical conception of geography,<sup>1</sup> but also with respect to vast temporal distances between the various extant examples, traces, of such expression. To this extent, our current analysis of early Greek thought will become a poetico-phenomenological hermeneutics of the archaic, Mediterranean lifeworld, although, one, due to the precise remit of this study, having a focal emphasis upon the specific emergence of early Greek thought. It will be assumed that there did arise a specific thoughtful ‘community’ – nexus – of philosophers in the sixth century who were not only aware of the works of others, but who were also overtly engaged in thoughtful *praxis* in the context of these horizons of the specific topography of thought which emerged, as a variegated ‘language game’. Nevertheless, this thoughtful trajectory and conversation did not emerge out of a ‘vacuum’, but arose amid the longstanding horizons, and textures, of previous works of thought. The difficulty with Heidegger’s way is that the insight that early Greek

thought emerged as an idiosyncratic, though mixed, type is lost, as is the attempt to divine a non-anachronistic interpretation of early Greek thought, one open to the broader expressive instances of thought from the second millennium BCE to the period under analysis. With Heidegger – even if his emphasis upon *Moirai*, *Aletheia* and *Logos* is compelling – we are forced to a large extent to take his perspective in a leap of faith. Moreover, there is, with his motif of the ‘West’, a decided prioritization of ‘Western’ philosophy and thought, despite the dark undertow of Heidegger analysis which would suggest that the ‘West’ is dying, or perhaps, is already dead. This notion of the death of the ‘West’ is, moreover, underlined by the notion that the ‘West’ was born, and that thought, and later philosophy *per se*, was born along with it – to the exclusion of the merely mythological cultures of the ‘East’. The problem with this position is not only the lack of such a clear East–West divide in the period of analysis, but also the dependency of the lexicon of primordality not only on disclosures of use in Homer, but also in the ultimately derivative character of Greek mytho-poetics, as such. Heidegger wishes us to believe that thought of Being emerged for the first time with the Greeks, and moreover, that the language of this apprehension of Being is that of *Muthos*. The question that could be asked of Heidegger: what of the possibility that the mythological poetics of the so-called ‘East’ are themselves instances of *Muthos*, and thus of primordial thought? Can this question be repeated also for the benefit of Hesiod or Orpheus, each of whom were engaged in the same trajectories of questioning as the Ionians – in respect of the ‘question of the first’? Or, in other words, could we not divine the schematics of *Moirai*, *Aletheia* and *Logos* in any mytho-poetically expressive culture of finite existence – and as the self-interpretation of such a culture? It is clear that Heidegger has himself engaged with such poetics, with Hölderlin, Georg Trakl, Sophocles, and a host of others. Is this a matter of divergent ‘houses of Being’, such as that contemplated in ‘Letter to a Japanese’?<sup>2</sup> Or is there a ‘mineness’ at work here – and of the still controversial contention that Greek and German languages are siblings, in some sense? Would such a focus be that of a mere philosophical anthropology, one requiring an ‘analytic of Dasein’, or fundamental ontology? However, what about the ‘turn’ (*Kehre*) – and the novel *topos* of *metontology*, of the topography which emerges as an openness to the truth of Being? Would it be possible perhaps to find a broader expressive *topos* of the ‘tragic’ which extends across geographies and temporal eras, in that the tragic is a binding cathexis of Fate, Truth and Language, expressed in *Muthos*? Could *Gilgamesh* be seen as tragic, for instance – or, even as an instance of *mortal thought*?

It would seem that the post-structuralist ‘irruption’ in philosophical thought, to a great extent, contemporaneous with, and also subsequent, to the work of the later Heidegger, in the works of Derrida, Foucault, Bataille and Krell may contribute to our attempt to answer these questions regarding Heidegger’s work on the early Greeks. Indeed, we could ‘argue’ that this movement in philosophy (and anti-philosophy) sought, in diverse ways, a convergence of the disparate insights of Heidegger and Nietzsche. In the first place, as we have ‘gathered’, there is nothing that would *forbid* us from precisely mapping Nietzsche’s poetic-topography of the Apollonian and Dionysian upon Heidegger’s temporal oscillations of *aletheia*. Indeed, what is the problem with such a mapping, from the perspective of phenomenological hermeneutics, of metontology, one that was originally intimated by Heidegger – himself – in his 1928 lecture course, ‘The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic’ – not to mention his ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, a work of thought that is oriented by the tragic play of *world* and *earth*, in a manner distinctly reminiscent of Apollo and Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*? In both of these cases, there is a concern for the *topos* of existential conditions and cultural forces which are necessary for there to be an affirmative – authentic – sublime, *human* creativity. In this way, neither of these thinkers is merely concerned with aesthetics, or a philosophy of art, but with creativity as a modality of human existence, and as a conduit through which primordial aspects of human existence may be disclosed.

While it has become ‘clear’, moreover, that Heidegger has his own ‘agenda’ – and ‘reasons’ to resist such an accord with Nietzsche in the domain of method – the latter’s accentuation of a metontological genealogy of divergent cultural forces may gain a more distinct relevance in light of Derrida’s criticism of that which he sees as Heidegger’s alleged ‘neo-Hegelianism’, with respect to the epochal schematism which places the ‘West’ at the pinnacle of existence and of which it is asserted a pure origin in an originary (and seemingly) exclusive apprehension of Being. Much of his work is relevant to our discussion, yet Derrida has made specific interventions which may have a direct pertinence to our current study.

In his disseminal essay, ‘Differance’, for instance, Derrida takes Heidegger to task, in a *coup de grace*, with respect to the very notion of Being. We have already discovered from this essay, that any expression of ‘identity’ is grounded upon a repression of difference, upon violence. Such an insight extends, at the same time, to the assertion of a unitary *origin* which expresses the *purity* or *propriety* of the ‘being’ – and to its ‘mystical foundation of authority’, of its ‘declaration of independence’. *Being itself* – and not merely *any* being, is expressed, in the protocols set forth by Derrida, in the language

of beings – amid the ‘truth of Being’. In this way, ‘Being’ itself is implicated – and arises in the context of a play of differences that is human language – or, as Derrida famously asserted, that *différance* was prior to Being [itself]. In this light, it must no longer be possible to *honestly* speak of a ‘structure’ of existence in the sense of an ontological difference between Being and Beings without a recourse to ‘violence’, of the suppression of difference – or, of the myriad anti-theticals as these are expressed in our grammar of time and existence. With the ethico-political implosion of ‘structure’, that which emerges are topographical, metontological textures of fluctuating existence, multiple ‘origins’ – each and all oscillating and transitioning amid the innocent play of *différance*. At the same time, it may be questioned whether the reading of Derrida is sound. It is clear that Derrida is wishing to ‘trump’ Heidegger’s *Aletheia*, of this play of unconcealment and concealment with his an-archic play of *différance* – or in other words, that *différance* is prior to Heidegger’s own vision of openness that he sought after the ‘turn’. To this extent, Derrida is attempting, with *his* deconstructive motif of difference, to dismantle the status of the lexicon of ‘Being’ which would then be re-inserted within the context of Heidegger’s own invocation of the *Nameless* in his ‘Letter on Humanism’ – which, among other issues, intimates Derrida’s radical *negative theology*, rampant in this period of his work. Yet, even if he is ‘right’ about *différance*, is he ‘right’ about Heidegger, especially with regards to the Open of the later Heidegger?

In our pursuit of the radical implications of Derrida, it would be noteworthy to assess one example of the *results* of Derrida’s deconstruction of Being. There are many implications to Derrida’s motif of *différance* that are not stated in his text. For instance, and this is perhaps an intimation of our tragic (or, perhaps *comedic* situation) despite the ‘fact’ that any statement of ‘identity’ involves repression, violence, we are incessantly saturated by such statements, of ‘identity’. What does this mean, that our existence, as it redeems itself in the fated Apollonian illusion of (tragic) identity, amid our own *dreamtime*, hides itself from the ‘terrible truth’ of its lowly origins – in the Dionysian? That ‘redemption’ is violence, that identity is violence – that language, and life itself, is contiguous with violence and repression, with ‘evil’ and abjection? Indeed, it could be stated that some phenomenon may arise, that through its own ‘power’, dare I say *sublimity*, or that an ‘event’ may occur, amid which there would be little, if any, need for violence – indeed, that a *gift* is possible, which would not require sacrifice, or our Adamic propensity for *naming*. Such ‘events’ occur incessantly, expressed in our silences before these uncanny events of existence, of beauty, joy and love. Yet, the

Gift erupts amid a 'sacrificial economy' of beauty and ugliness, of joy and sorrow, of love and hate, and most primordial of all, of comedy and tragedy, of the Janus-faced texture of existence and being. Derrida gives a hearing to the voices of the voiceless in his *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*,<sup>3</sup> where he, among other provocations, contests Heidegger's utter 'silence' upon *Judaism* (*Ruah*) in the 'history of Being', of Spirit (as with the silence of Abraham, in Derrida's *The Gift of Death*<sup>4</sup>). Of course, such a 'provocation' is 'grounded' upon the motif of *différance* in its eventful playfulness, and would have direct and precise relevance for our current discussion – if, it did not make such a fundamental error. Surely, we can accept much of 'what' Derrida says, even if such 'coherent' articulation – according to his 'conventions' of the 'lie' – must be, in the end, 'grounded' upon a violence, repression and reduction of its own. Derrida was quite aware of this paradox, and made the suggestion that the motif itself would need to be eventually rejected. Nevertheless – and despite the utter pregnancy of Derrida's suggestions – his intervention in this 'context' falls radically short, as it is clear that Derrida has radically misunderstood Heidegger. For, as we have already seen, the 'history of Being', the meta-narrative of the epoch of metaphysics, is an economy of errancy. One can only be *tainted* with an association with the *West* – this evening land, setting upon the precipice of the abyss. Why on earth would the 'Jews' want to be stuck with 'us' in our death-bound plunge? Perhaps, Heidegger does not regard Judaism as a thread in the tapestry of errancy, of the forgetfulness of Being. It is interesting, that in the 'report' by the Nazis on Heidegger – instigated by Bäumler – stated that he was not only a 'schizophrenic' (Deleuze can *prick up his ears*), but also, espoused 'Jewish Ideas'. As Fred Dallmayr<sup>5</sup> has made clear to us, there is *another* Heidegger, though one who may hate us for placing him in regions, which he would not 'normally' traverse. For, while it might truly be an insult to Judaism to be included in a 'history of Being', it must not – in light of the post-structuralist deconstruction of [Being], be forbidden to be open to myriad influences that disseminate some approximation – pointing to *this* – of the provocations that tempestuously surge beneath, before an 'event'.

Nevertheless, such considerations only intimate a deeper question that hovers over the power of Derrida's reading. Beyond the problem of the paradox of writing (anything beyond *dadaist* phonetics in the manner of Hugo Ball) and of the controversial questions surrounding Heidegger's schematization of a 'History of Being', is that of Derrida's seeming 'subjectivism', at least in terms of his rhetoric, with respect to questions of repression and violence. For, we will admit that the *elsewhere* of his play of *différance* is not that of *Aletheia*. Yet, that which Derrida is 'missing' is the 'epochal'



character of Heidegger's later thought – or, in other words, Derrida would make it seem that the repression and violence is some kind of intention act, of a subjective that would be guilty of an ethical infraction against possibility itself. For, it must be recalled that Heidegger's indication of *Aletheia* intimates an 'event' of un-concealment and of concealment amidst epochal economy of Being. As Schürmann has disclosed, an epochal economy, in its dispensation, lays out the horizon of possibilities for that epoch – as was even that case in *Being and Time*, as thrown – we do not decide Fate. 'Words' and 'Things' acquire meaning in the context of their epoch – or with Wittgenstein, their language game and form of life – with usage determined within this – admittedly – temporal context.

Leaving the *utopic* negative theology of Derrida aside, Foucault, influenced by Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger, enacted radical 'epistemic' projects, dubbed 'histories of the present' through his genealogy of those 'modernist', 'Western' *ideology units*, specified by his teacher, Louis Althusser. Yet, instead of 'walking out of a window with his books in his hands', Foucault is drawn to a 'critical ontology of the self',<sup>6</sup> to genealogies of our very emergence as 'subjects', as the 'artworks' and 'constructions' of existence. The 'devil' – as we may say – is 'in the details', in the archival exposure of the 'tragico-comic drama' of existence, yet, 'angels' lie in the *order of things*, in the contexts of emergence of our 'multi-dimensional' existence. Foucault enacts *genealogy* amidst myriad 'contexts' – and, in light of Heidegger's intimation, not only of that *mathesis* of the epoch, but also with respect to the 'artwork' as disclosive. Foucault acts, even within constraints, upon the *topos* of resistance – we are well aware of Habermas's questioning of Foucault as to the 'normative' ground (or lack thereof) of his critique. It should be recalled that Foucault enacted his genealogies *in situ*. For instance, during his research upon *Madness and Civilization*,<sup>7</sup> he worked in an *asylum* – or, during his work on *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,<sup>8</sup> he worked with the GFI (the Group for Prison Information), an encounter which, it must be said, led to prison riots. Yet, does anyone believe James Miller, in his 'intellectual' gossip, that Foucault disseminated the AIDS virus as an act of transgression? Whether or not we choose to plunge into maelstrom of 'idle chatter', such a question indicates the seriousness of Habermas's criticism of Foucault, who described genealogy as dry and meticulous, and scoured the archives for interesting traces in his 'Nietzsche Genealogy History'.<sup>9</sup> The question becomes: what is the criterion of selection, of tracing itself – in other words, why should we not believe Miller's rumour?

Foucault famously answered that when he is dead, the police and bureaucrats can sort out his papers. Yet, he did not leave things in such a state of



disarray, if we can comprehend the epochal principle that is operative in his deconstructive project. Indeed, the ‘possibilities’ of our epoch are disclosed as the limits of our existence, possibilities include many divergent pathways, often in radical states of conflict. It would seem that, in light of his thought on the Ancients, that it is, at the end of the day, his way of life, his intellectual–bodily practise, amid the context of our epoch, will be assessed, fathomed, in reference to its indigenous protocols. Whether or not such an answer would satisfy Habermas is not our concern here – but instead, that which such a radical *impasse* unveils with respect to horizons, and practises, of a ‘radical hermeneutics’ of existence. We can never ‘know’ this intimate ‘intentionality’ of Foucault, his ‘imaginative universe’, but, only in this way, denial, can such gossip ‘find any feet’. Yet, such a predicament is indicative of existence itself, as a ‘cloud of *unknowing*’ hovers over us as our *tragic absolute*. Yet, even, with Democritus, if there is no access to Reality (Lacan), we still thirst for the Divine, Fate, Chance. It is thought under the aspect of Fate that invokes his arid genealogy of history as an strand of his own critical ontology of the self.

Krell, himself thrown into this *aporetic* vortex, influenced as he is by all of the names in the previous pages, immerses himself amid ‘early Greek thinking’, with a specific affinity to Empedocles. It is clear that Krell’s scholarship on Nietzsche and Heidegger is second to no one – indeed, without his work on the translations of Heidegger’s essays and lectures upon the early Greeks, this current project would probably have never been conceived (though he must not be blamed for it.) Yet, one could imagine that, with his peculiar proclivity toward disease and infection, that – with the right Nietzschean ‘reasons’ and ‘incitements’ – Krell immersed himself in a genealogical project of the body with its ‘love’ and ‘strife’. In this light, the radical ‘*impasse*’ disclosed in the context of ‘Foucault’ need not be fatal – or, perhaps, the ‘fatality’ of the project itself intimates the ironic languishment which *is* our search for the tragic absolute. Amid this metontological *topos* of ‘love’ and ‘strife’, we trace the myriad contexts of the flesh and blood, of power and political crimes, genocide and resistance. We could further imagine that, in the blinding light of a deeper descent into the *maelstrom*, Krell realized the ever-expanding sun of Hölderlin, not only in the ‘development’ of German Idealism – but as a precedent to Nietzsche and Heidegger – both of them had ‘lived’ with Hölderlin, as did Hegel and Schelling. Perhaps this intimation had been there all along – however, the question would remain of the status of Empedocles as a ‘primordial thinker’ of early Greece. Krell would seem to think so now, and in a way that was not clearly evident in his “Introduction” to *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy*. Indeed, the last philosophical works of Krell – as he has let it slip that he is now writing

fiction – are *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing of God*, which is a reflection upon German Idealism in light of his explorations of the increasing fascination of Empedocles upon Hölderlin, and a translation with commentary, of Hölderlin's unfinished tragedy, *The Death of Empedocles*.<sup>10</sup> While Heidegger would perhaps contend that Empedocles is derivative of Heraclitus – or dismiss him for his supposed implication within a very questionable Platonic interpretation of 'Pythagorean' thought – Krell is perhaps showing his affinity to Nietzsche's genealogies of 'lowly origins', and of the 'mixed' character of mortal existence. Empedocles articulates the predicament of mortal existence amidst his radical, and immanent, hermeneutics of existence. He discloses *this* – context of Each and All – as a *topos* in which he himself is tragically embedded as a questioner and in which he loses himself as if in a maelstrom of the vortex or the eruption of a volcano. With 'Empedocles', mortal thought clears its own *topos*, erupting as this play of *love* and *strife* and of the vortex between the *two* – amid which all things emerge – this is Being – the elements in their eternal recurrence, of the tragic absolute beyond which, below which – is there any need of 'revelation'? Or perhaps, is *this*, each and all, revealed as the play between *love* and *strife*, through *this* flesh and blood of immanent existence?

While we can consider the specific 'conversation' between Heraclitus and Empedocles in Part 2, 'Tragic Thought', our current study *needs a topos*, in which we can 'synthesize' these myriad insights of Nietzsche, Heidegger and the *chaotic* voices of the post-structuralists – not to mention the ever-present insights of Wittgenstein. It would seem that Bataille could be our 'arbiter' in this 'context', as he was not only 'influenced' by Nietzsche and Heidegger, but also radically influenced the post-structuralists (several of which we have no time to mention, not to mention those amongst the surrealists and others and radical thinkers such as Pierre Klossowski and Maurice Blanchot, or Lacan (imaginary, symbolic, real), and the *imago*, Deleuze (matter and singularity). Bataille takes the plunge into a Dionysian genealogy of 'lowly origins', this self-interpretation of existence and, amidst the inescapable suspension betwixt this 'wildness of *ipseity* and 'communion', he lays out the most radical insights of play and power, love and strife, sacrifice and gift, of this insurmountable 'necessity' or 'usefulness' of 'language games', 'forms of life' (not to mention the lures beyond, below 'ordinary' madness of existence to 'its' uttermost 'extremes'). Bataille conjures forth a radically *intimate* 'hermeneutics of existence', in diverse 'texts' and – always *makeshift* – 'projects'.

Bataille would be our *new* 'Kant' if he was not such a lecher and pervert. Or, perhaps, that is just what we *need*. Be that as it may, he not only incorporates the insights of 'heritage', but also prophesies *unconsciously* the 'history

of *our* future'. Bataille is *our* thinker, the 'poet' of our 'time'. He is the thinker of *strife* and *love* in our era, of eroticism and the sacred, of the dissolution of self in ecstatic, orgiastic events, of intoxicated poetry and dis-intoxicated prose. He is aware of the 'breach' – of *utopia* and *spirits* – but also of the *topos* of profane existence – yet, this comfortable distinction – in the manner of Kant and his *unconscious* heirs – is not comfortable in that there is *no safe island*, protected from the overwhelming Ocean, from Chaos. Bataille, as with Edgar Allan Poe, in the 'Masque of the Red Death', exposes claims of *purity* as already always cast into relief amidst the dispersion, of the light and shadow, of existence. It is this existence and its conditions that are *shown* by Bataille in his dispersed works, as he 'speaks' across disparate places, 'paints every visible object'.<sup>11</sup> Though, he is not himself lost in dispersion.

With respect to the meta-philosophical intent of our hermeneutical exploration of the context of emergence of early Greek thought, Bataille, as we have intimated, depicts, across many of his works, not only a post-structuralist topography of epochs, but also, an immanent expose of the indigenous textures of existence of these latter epochs. Indeed, in a manner that is consistent with the work of Nietzsche, Bataille places emphasis upon the transformation of the archaic epoch, and its economy of the Gift, and the epoch of 'religion within the limits of reason', with respect to the collaboration of Christianity and capitalism. Bataille, in his short work, *Theory of Religion*,<sup>12</sup> portrays an archaic sense of the sacred which intimates an epochal lifeworld with its own internal economy and of vast possibilities, through festivals of the gift, of the *potlatch*, for the interaction between disparate tribal groupings and of the diffusions of cultural artefacts and lore which would occur in the context of these sacred interactions. To a significant extent, such festivals have a parallel significance with Bataille's indication of the meaning of sacrifice as the destruction of the object of utility, of identity, for the purpose of activating the sacred space of the 'spirits', of the *useless* – as opposed to the *profane*. Festival, in this way, breaks down barriers of identity and kinship, and with the potlatch, intimates the sacred as a sacrifice, yet in the context of self-annihilating gift-giving. Such an orchestration has a distinct family resemblance with Nietzsche's genealogy of Attic tragedy, through which is depicted the emergence of Apollonian individuation, and of its sacrifice, destruction, return to the Dionysian womb of Being. In either case, such is a sacred that is intimate with its own shadow, of the exteriority and primordially of violence, of terror, horror, similar to the sense of the sublime in Schopenhauer. This sensitivity to the artistic, literary, and religious textures of the archaic world will allow us to

comprehend the hermeneutic necessity of *ontic* – factual genealogies – ‘philosophical anthropology’ – for instance, in our specification of the *topos*, the context of emergence for early Greek thought. Moreover, in light of Bataille’s excavation, in the wake of Mauss, of the archaic economy of the Gift and the purpose of sacrifice, we will be able to transcend the dispersion of mere facticity in an explication of a ‘general ontology’, or economics, of archaic culture.

In his *Accursed Share*,<sup>13</sup> Vol. I, Bataille speaks of the *general economy* of ‘energy’, of the radical exteriority of the sacred – of that which, as with eroticism, violence, intoxication – of the Dionysian – which exists at the limits of order, but also, in the radical interiority of the individuated self and community. The sacred may erupt at any moment, in any place, as the destruction of order, habit, belief – intoxication, violence, orgy threaten the profane world at every turn. Bataille situates these tensions in reference to his distinction between the general and restricted economy. As we have seen, the general economy, as with the Dionysian, is the inescapable situation of primordial energy. The world of utility, of the profane, on the other hand, is that of a restricted economy, of an Apollonian orchestration of an ‘order of things’, of objects, words, practises and sciences, erected as a protocol for the production and reproduction of concrete existence, of work (and its ‘Masters’ and ‘Slaves’). Bataille has furthermore, in his essay ‘The Psychological Structure of Fascism’,<sup>14</sup> made a parallel distinction between that of the ‘heterogeneous’ and the ‘homogeneous’. It is with this distinction that he analyses the general and restricted economies of the ‘state’, in this case, that of ‘fascism’. That which is significant in these explorations of the epochal economy, and of its internal dynamics, are the methods by which a historical culture comes to terms with the facticity of the general economy, of the Dionysian and of the Apollonian attempts to stand in the storm of *phusis* in the maintenance of its ‘order of things’. For Bataille, archaic cultures enacted sacrifice as a way of coming to terms with the Dionysian, the violence of the general economy. Instead of merely standing against the threatening, the sublime, in the deceitful illusion that ‘we’ are somehow *not of this world* (in the manner of Platonism and Christianity), archaic cultures enacted sacrifice so as to not only acknowledge the outside which is also inside, but also, as a social and individual practise of expenditure, of ‘catharsis’ (releasement), as in the case of Greek tragedy.

It is perhaps the Fate of the later cultures of Platonism and Christianity to forget this primordial lesson of the necessity of Saturnalia, of festival, of intoxication, eroticism – of the dissolution of the self in the *recognition* of its tragic predicament. It can only be ironic that – despite the delusions of

those with 'otherworldly hopes' – there is no escape from the heart of darkness, but that the violence meets its expenditure through war, the repression of eroticism, rejection of the other, illustrated amid centuries of persecution, as history. Perhaps we may excuse Derrida what seems to be his excessive posture if we may allow him also to have his *own* context of emergence. For the play of *différance* may be seen as comedy – as laughter in the face of the inescapable tragedy, and of the second order tragedy of 'religion within the limits of reason', of the era of profane violence, and the homogenizing state. To this extent, as with the notion of wit in the aesthetics of Friedrich Schlegel, such laughter is subversive as it seeks to dismantle, to bring down the ironic phantasm of the closure of metaphysics. Such a comedic response would be amenable to Bataille as one of those events in which the self becomes ecstatic, intoxicated, in a joyous festival of one's own tragic mortality. In this way, there can be no comedy, without tragedy – though it must certainly be regarded as preferable to war, persecution and genocide. Death becomes a festival – tragic ecstasy.

That which we have gathered from the previous discussion is a 'careful' specification of not only the precise question, but also the methodology of the current study. We seek out an understanding of early Greek thought as a phenomenon of the archaic lifeworld. This not only means that we trace out a genealogy of its context of emergence, but that, in light of our sensitivity to the horizons for early Greek thought, we also seek to comprehend this *thinking in the thought* – as an indigenous, 'authentic' *thinking practice*. Such an indication intimates this 'world-historical' *topos* of philosophical questioning, not ensnared by the anachronistic stratagems of those who would still use the expressions 'pre-socratic' or 'pre-platonic' when referring to early Greek thought, itself after all, a child of its times, and of a fertile lifeworld of archaic mytho-poetic thought. At the same time – and in a manner consistent with both Nietzsche and Heidegger – the great 'Gift' that the archaic world may give us, through an indigenous disclosure of its significance, of its thought, and of the *dignity* of its mytho-poetic accomplishment, is a chance *for us* to see the world in a different way, to think differently, to dismantle our current preoccupations and prejudices amidst a *topos* of thought that challenges us to face our own tragic predicament.

It is in this primordial *topos* of Fate, and of its radical disclosure that will allow us to dispel any narrow disputes which stand in the way of an indigenous understanding of early Greek thought – as a project that requires diverse voices, even if 'strict party lines' must incessantly be crossed – if, that is, we are to remain 'true' to the phenomenon.

## Part Two

# Tragic Thought



## Chapter 6

# The Question of the First: Thales and Anaximander

### Prelude: The Context of Emergence and the Ionian Movement

It is my wish – at this point in this study – that shadows of doubt have begun to creep into the ‘Western’ mythology, ‘ideology’, the *habitual repetition* of statements – that Thales is the first philosopher and with his fellow Ionians broke with all existing forms of knowledge, as is the perspective of most Analytic and Continental philosophers alike. Indeed, in our ‘account’, the ‘breach’ will take place much later with Plato and Christianity. As we have intimated, and as we will see in more detail in the following chapters, there is a radical continuity of Thales – and the ‘entirety’ of early Greek thought – with the context of emergence of the archaic life-world. Indeed, we could contend that no *adequate* understanding of early Greek thought would be possible ‘outside’ these methodological horizons. It is, in this light, our intention, in the following, to clear a ‘place’ for a portrayal of the indigenous ‘conversation’ of early Greek thought in a manner that is cognisant of the irreducible significance of the fragments of early Greek thought within the horizons of its context of emergence. The benefit of the approach is the conjuration of the philosophical life-world of the early Greeks in a manner which ‘disrupts’ the philological dispersion of these seminal thinkers into the suffocating idle chatter of source criticism and designations of doxographic authority. Besides Nietzsche’s incomplete attempt to conjure forth the personalities of the early Greek thinkers, there has been no work that lays out a coherent narrative of early Greek thought that would be sufficient, not only to allow us to comprehend this thought, but also, to recognize the sovereignty of this *topos* – irrespective of its tragic openness to uncertainty, ambiguity, and mortality.



The Ionians – Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Xenophanes and Heraclitus – have been *traditionally* regarded as the first philosophers. The Ionians dwelled in an Athenian colony in Western Asia Minor, which is the west coast of Turkey. Ionia is famous, beyond its status as the ‘birthplace of philosophy’, for having been partially destroyed during the later wars with Persia, with Melitus, the city of philosophers, tragically annihilated, as were its philosophers. Thales received the honor of being not only the first philosopher, but also one of the ‘Seven Sages’, for his prediction of an eclipse in 585 BCE. It is certainly on the basis of such praise and accolades that Aristotle not only dubs Thales the *first* – yet, every gift has the taint of the poison of sacrifice – but also, confines him within the category of ‘natural philosopher’. We – and this includes everyone familiar with Aristotle – understand the latter’s ‘reasons’ for such a blatant ‘falsification’ – yet, such ‘traditions’ must be placed into radical question. For, clearly, it is not possible to understand early Greek thought if we allow our interpretation to succumb to the constellations of human, all too human, ‘authority’.

A question to Aristotle – why does philosophy begin here? The ‘act’ of making Thales the first philosopher implies a ‘break’ with myth and mythopoetics – that there is a ‘transition’ to philosophy *proper*. What does such a ‘transition’ mean, upon ‘what’ is it grounded, and is it true, even correct? Is philosophy merely ‘rationalization’, cutting out of myth, throwing poets out of the *polis*, again? Are Patôcka, and Badiou, *truthful* in their characterization of myth as that which pertains to an ‘uncritical past’, and must be confronted with the devastation of *cold* philosophy, which lacerates the ‘present’ with its vivisectionist questions? Or is there another way to account for the emergence of ‘philosophy’? Should we buy into the current anachronistic accounts? Should we look to Nietzsche, and the tragic innocence of existence? Or, is early Greek thought, again, a la Heidegger, the fateful event of a direct apprehension of Being by *thinkers*, a retrieval of their own underlying *abgrund* (German for ‘Abyss’) of *Muthos*, one fallen from the tree of an even earlier apprehension of Being? Or, can we, with Wittgenstein, Derrida, and Bataille, speak instead of an emergence of a community or at least a network of philosophers, amidst, perhaps, a scholarly language community, of teacher and student, one which became distinct from the language community of myth, at least in terms of its ‘traditional’ articulation in works of poetic performance? Or, perhaps, ‘philosophy’ is originally performance art, cast into the light by poetic philosophers – indeed, Pythagoras, who coined the word ‘philosopher’ orchestrated his *theoria* and *praxis* amidst a *bios* of the oral tradition. Poet-philosophers – no wonder Plato threw them out of his Ideal Polis! Or – is *each and all* – none – of these

‘stories’, ‘explanations’, vital in its own way amidst our ‘genealogy’, of this emergence of philosophy?

We have ascertained that the ‘reading’ which emphasizes the definitive ‘rationalist’, or ‘scientific’ break is misleading and anachronistic, in light of our exploration of the *context of emergence* as a confrontation of distinct mythological poetics. ‘Rationalism’ (and its shadow, ‘empiricism’) seek to shut down the very questioning that will lead to ‘truth’.

We must keep clearly in the open, this ‘context of emergence’, as we see it ‘play’ itself out in the philosophies of the early Ionians, as there is a specific ‘syncretism’ between ‘Orphic’ doctrines of eternal recurrence and the Homeric, Hesiodic genealogies of divinities, and of the Dionysian world as *that* primordial source. Beyond the hermeneutical criteria for our ‘primal’ emphasis upon a *context of emergence*, we must grasp the significance of our perspective as a genealogy of an indigenous *mixed* type. The key is that no suggestion is being made that will endorse the claim that philosophy – as mortal thought – begins with the Ionians. Indeed, just as Kathleen Freeman discloses in her *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, it is clear that, just as in the case of our ‘rationalists’ and ‘empiricists’ in the Modern era (in relation to, for instance, the context for the emergence of the *topoi* of transcendental idealism, Romanticism, not to mention German Idealism), we will regard Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus (the Dionysian ‘Near East’) as ‘pre-socratic philosophers’, early ‘Greek’ thinkers. Admittedly, such a designation is misleading, if we recall the broader context of the Mediterranean lifeworld – however, in that our focus in the current study is early Greek philosophy, we can regard the Orphic tendencies as indispensable mytho-noetic sources for our topology of indigenous thinking.

We have already intimated the basic aspects arising from mytho-poetic thought which configured the *context of emergence* for Ionian, and later philosophers:

- I. The question of Being, of the ‘One and the Many’, which is resolved into A. the question of the *first* and B. the four elements (‘divinities’);
- II. The question of Becoming, which is resolved into A. Cyclical metamorphosis, or eternal recurrence and B. a power of indigenous change or transformation.

We have drawn these aspects from the confrontation of Apollonian and Dionysian art forms (of the Doric and Orphic) in the manner of Nietzsche – but, as a context that has only been clarified and augmented through considerations of the contemporary mytho-linguistics of Burkert and

Penglase, but also one that has not only been interrogated by Heidegger, and which has also been defended and augmented by the post-structuralists. In these terms, as a 'guide' for that which is to follow, I would like to lay out a rough sketch of the Ionians as an integral philosophical *topos*, each articulating a perspective amidst the context of the question as such – in a manner similar to not only the early German Romantics and Idealists, such as Schelling, but also, to Nietzsche himself, our classical philologist. In this way, it will be possible to lay out an Ionian *topos* for philosophical conversation and questioning in light of not only extant and explicit engagements between these thinkers, but also due to the happy 'fact' that each of the respective philosophers (excepting Anaximander) 'grounded' his philosophy upon one of the four elements. In this way, we will be able to retrieve a probable 'conversation' between these philosophers and understand not only the similarities and differences that are exhibited in their respective philosophical positions, but also of the *topos* as a whole, as an indigenous, though mixed type, a unity of opposites, a makeshift of tragic philosophy.

### The Ionians: Rough Sketch

		2) Anaximander      Unlimited Time as tuneful adjustment	
1) Thales	Water	4) Xenophanes	Earth
'Gods are in everything'		'All moves with the thoughts of God'	
3) Anaximenes	Air	5) Heraclitus	Fire
Rarefaction/ Condensation		'thunderbolt steers are things'	
(Pneuma, Breath)		'unity of opposites'	
		(Logos, voice)	

This *rough sketch* – based as it is upon the aspects of the context of emergence, will serve as a provisional schema for an explication of Ionian philosophy. Before we proceed, however, we must review our distillation of the context of emergence from amid the encounter of differing mytho-poetic narratives and horizons, of the 'orientalizing revolution'. On the one hand, there is the Doric mytho-poetic world, of Homer and Hesiod (itself originally diffused from Second Millenium 'sources' in Babylon and Sumeria), which is characterized by a motif of the 'first' – of chaos, of the emergence of divinities and aspects from this creative chaos, successionistic and linear

change, in the manner of violent dynastic overthrows, and the notion that, for the mortal, there is not only an inevitable descent into decadence with respect to culture, but also that at death, the spirit descends into the Underworld to persist in a state of nostalgic thirst for blood. On the other hand, there is the Orphic, which is characterized by a 'point of departure' in *duplicity*, with Time and Necessity, the emergence of divinities and aspects, metamorphic, cyclical or perhaps *spirilic* transformation, and the narrative for the mortal, that there persists an affirmation of Fate amidst this brief disclosure, one that is thematized as a return to the divine source of each and All – the mytho-poetic narrative of the 'tragic myth', the Dionysian *poesis* of the birth, death and rebirth.

Earlier, in the context of our reading of Nietzsche, we cast into relief the *conflictual* state of affairs which became the prerequisite *topos* for the emergence of tragedy, of tragic poetry and thought. As we can ascertain through a comparison of the 'criteria' of the context of emergence with its sources in Doric and Orphic thought, the *Gift* of the Greek 'miracle', as an emergent *form of life* and mytho-poetic – or, a linguistic, communicative, symbolic – *topos*, required a *sacrifice*, a struggle, as Nietzsche describes, through which the emergent form will manifest its elements and aspects, as a novel topography of cultural existence and expression. To this extent, that which had emerged from the *agon* (Greek word for 'contest') of mytho-poetic giants was a persistent interest in Being and Becoming – for the former, the persistent Hesiodic question of the 'first', of the Elements, Earth, Air, Fire, and Water (abbreviated divinities), and myriad narratives of 'One and the Many' – though, with the *proviso*, that even with the Ionians, there were laid the 'grounds', with Anaximander, for the eventual displacement of *the first*, conceived as *a being*, in Empedocles. Yet, this intimation of displacement itself *bleeds* into the latter dimension of *becoming* – and reveals to us the ultimately artificial distinction of our provisional indications – for, with respect to the *context of emergence*, the notion of becoming is strongly influenced by the Orphic, Dionysian mytho-poetics of eternal recurrence. Cyclical – or, perhaps, *spirilic* recurrence, metamorphic transformation as opposed to successionistic linearity, and a motive force of change that is indicated as an *endogenous* power matrix – of an *energeia* – that has no need – as with the *Kosmos* – of an external, unmoved mover, but is itself the 'structural' source of its own 'power'. It is clear that a tragic philosophy, tragic thought, does not seek an *alibi* or a source of 'comfort' and certainty, beyond its own intimate horizons of uncertainty, fragility, and of the disclosure of the *terrible truth*. Nor, does it derive its *power* from some *elsewhere*, beyond its own horizons of existential significance, *praxis* and *poiesis*.

## Thales of Melitus (624–546 BC)

It would readily be possible to ‘construct’ a narrative, following Aristotle, that Thales is ‘natural’ in his approach to the extent that water is the ‘source of life’, as moisture, or even – some have dared to say – that the body is eight-tenths water, or that earth itself is eight-tenths water – and *that explains everything*. Such claims are lucidly, ridiculously anachronistic – and clearly and distinctly *violent*, merely projecting the schema of the ‘scientific world-view’ upon a *thinker* whose status is far from certain. Thales is created in the image of the ‘scientists’ as a precursor, though as one who persists in a state of inadequacy. Such anachronism is possible in light of not only the paucity of evidence, there are four fragments that are attributed with a high degree of certainty to Thales, but also due to the interpretive hegemony of Aristotle and the *sleepwalkers*, who merely repeat his assessment of the context of significance of not only Thales, but of the early Greek thinkers as a whole. Nevertheless, the fragments in themselves are meaningless – and, one of them is deemed a *forgery* – each is ‘open’ to myriad interpretive contexts, and this is the task of the current study to dismantle the hegemonic interpretation of early Greek thought, as disseminated, for instance in Aristotle’s *Physics*, in which he savages the early Greek thinkers with his patronizing glare.

The fragments of Thales that Freeman has set forth are the following:

1. (Title: ‘Nautical Astronomy’)
2. (‘There are two Hyades, one north and one south’).
3. (‘The much discussed four substances – of which we say the chief is Water, making it as it were the one Element – by combination and solidification and coagulation of the substances in the universe mingle with one another,. In what way, I have already explained in Book One.’)
4. (Title: ‘On the solstice’, ‘On the Equinox’)

The first and last are ambiguous – suspended between the ‘tragic’ and ‘optimistic’ perspectives – although there is no question as to the compatibility of astronomy or mathematics with myth, as we can ascertain from even a brief encounter with Babylon. The second fragment is quite ambiguous as well – how are we to interpret the ‘Hyades’? Should we interpret this reference in terms of ‘Modern’, or, in the manner of Aristotelian conceptions of ‘astronomy’, where the ‘world’, as with the strange bedfellows of both ‘Radical Orthodox Theology’<sup>1</sup> and ‘Speculative Realism’<sup>2</sup>, becomes mere matter and its *etiological* transfigurations? Or, should we instead see Hyades

in light of not only its mytho-poetic horizon of reference, but also, of the significance given to the Hyades in the poetic thought of Musaeus – each of these references cast the *Hyades* in a radically different light. The Hyades, in this way, do not have merely astronomical, whether ancient or modern, meaning or significance, but, as indicated, the Hyades are the ‘nurses’ of Dionysus, who are mourning the death of their brother Hylas. Perhaps, we could divine from the polymorphous significance of this motif an epoch in which there was a ‘synchronicity’ of ‘science’, ‘philosophy’ and ‘religion’ – an epoch surely different than our own. Nevertheless, this reference is more than ambiguous, and its potential incongruity with the mythology of natural science will allow us to begin to not only dismantle the hegemonic interpretation so as to disclose an indigenous understanding of archaic thought, but also to become ‘untimely’, ourselves, descending into ‘primordial’ thought, mytho-poetics, expression. Indeed, there are many ways to ‘read’ any of these texts – two Hyades . . . north and south, perhaps life and death. In any event, as the three genuine fragments are ambiguous, it will be necessary to consider the third, with the hope that it will allow for a decision as the significance of the philosophy of Thales.

Fragment 3 is regarded as a forgery by Freeman, but in what sense? Indeed, there are several features which must concern us – in the first place, it is expressed in an obviously late, post-Aristotelian lexicon. This latter concern would be sufficient to discount the fragment as a forgery – but does this necessitate that we simply ignore the content of the fragment? As we readily see, the fragment is maintained by Freeman in that it provides ‘evidence’ of that which is perhaps original Thalean content. For, how are we to make sense of not only the distinct elements, but also, of the metamorphic transmutation of ‘substances’? Such a sophisticated notion, of a cyclical transformation must be examined in terms of its source. Indeed, we could argue, from the perspective of a perhaps *negative* Aristotelianism, that, in light of the Orphic aspect of the context of emergence, this fragment is an expression of an originary *mytho-poiesis* of eternal recurrence – to this extent, the fragment is not a forgery, in this sense, and would prove to be illuminating with respect to the philosophy of Thales.

With respect to the *context of emergence*, sketched out above, we can state that Thales regarded *the first* (of the One) as Water. In other words, he designates *the first*, unlike Hesiod with his ‘Chaos’ and the Orphic *topos* of ‘Time’ and ‘Necessity’, to be first amongst an array of elements, which exists in a state of eternal recurrence. Such a cycle indicates not only the relation of the One (Water) and the Many (Earth, Air, Fire), but also provides an ‘account’ of the totality of that which is, or existence. The pre-eminence of

Water – contrary to the other naturalist readings – we may safely assume, in light of its Orphic character, to be derived from Babylonian myth. Such a contention has merit, as we have intimated in reference to the astro-mathematical knowledge of Babylon, which allowed Thales to predict his eclipse, and thus, ironically, to become our *first* philosopher. It is significant that the allegedly ‘scientific’ elements of his thought are, from the perspective of its context of emergence, quite congruent with mythological poetics. This underscores the anachronism of the claim that Thales was a natural scientist who had rejected myth. There is no evidence for this claim.

The plausibility of our interpretation is further underlined in answer to the question of the ‘motive force’, or, Becoming for the cyclical metamorphosis and for the life of each being. Thales is said to have declared, ‘The Gods are in everything.’ Such a statement may perhaps be difficult to explain within the paradigm of the natural scientist, except as a ‘primitive’ echo in a philosophy that has yet to reach the standpoint of the *matheme* (Badiou). Yet, in itself, it would seem that the contention of a break with *Muthos*, of all existing forms of knowledge is, at the very least, premature. Or, perhaps, this statement would make more sense in terms of our current exploration, in our contention of a radical continuity of early Greek thought with its context of emergence. In this light, that which we would have, if we gather together the various aspects of the context of emergence, is a ‘presentation’ of the totality of existence as a cyclical metamorphosis of elements, one that has itself arisen from the primordial element of Water, and is orchestrated by divine powers, or Gods. In itself, such a ‘system’ would allow us to trace the divergent sources, which as Nietzsche outlined in the *Birth of Tragedy*, which came together to give rise to even the possibility of such a sophisticated account of existence. The tragic aspect of this philosophy would be disclosed, in line with Nietzsche’s indications of the Dionysian and the Apollonian as the individuation of beings (including human beings) and their inexorable dissolution in the cyclical metamorphosis of the *Kosmos*.

Granted, there are few fragments, though there are myriad testimonies and references to Thales. The latter, though perhaps tainted with anachronism, need not however be thrown out of play. We are not questioning the ‘facts’, the *hearsay*, or the doxography – our primary concern must abide with the hermeneutical context, with the question of the ‘significance’ of the traces of this archive. From this perspective, we may recognize and take into account the distinct family resemblances between Thales and both the Homeric-Hesiodic tradition and that of Orphic poetry, and we would be – I argue – hard-pressed to approach the very ‘sense’ of the philosophy of

Thales without either a direct reference to its mytho-poetic background, or, to an 'account' which sought to nullify the contention of a break with this background.

### Anaximander of Melitus (610–546 BC)

Anaximander, who is regarded as a student of Thales, is perhaps, if we accept that the Ionians were the first philosophers, the first to enter into a critical philosophical 'engagement' with another philosopher. In this light, it could be suggested that 'philosophy' emerged, with Anaximander, as a specific type of conversation, one exhibiting a distinct discursive strategy and style. This insight – tainted as it is with a picture of an *autonomy* amongst the 'Greeks' – is still compatible, either with the proposed restricted 'game' or the 'economy' of *paidos* (Greek word for 'education') of the sixth-century Ionians, or, with the 'general economy' of the archaic world and its mytho-poetic horizons. In this scenario, the inferred 'criticisms' of Thales by Anaximander would have laid the basis for the coalescence of this language community, one perhaps distinct from those of other styles and trajectory such as performance poetry, drama, and ritual *telete* (Greek word for 'spirit of the Dionysian festival').

Nevertheless, there is only one fragment from Anaximander, though it is regarded as the oldest written source in the Western tradition. Of course, as is the case with most of the early Greek thinkers, certain 'stipulations' must be stated with respect to our 'certainties'. On the one hand, Anaximander does not refer to Thales, though we regard his fragment as having pertinence to Thales in light of his 'status' as the teacher of Anaximander. On the other hand, we cannot be certain of the traditional, or conventional, narrative of *paidos*, of the persistent student–teacher relationship. As was the case with Thales, we have mere titles of works which have an ambiguous reference – which, as I have suggested, has played into the hands of the 'anachronists'. Yet, it has become clear, however, that the context of emergence provides a background horizon of significance which allows us to provide an alternative interpretation which has substantial merit. Nevertheless, that which is not clear is the mode of dissemination of this novel movement of philosophical thought. Of course, our traditional narrative of the 'rejection of myth' entails a concomitant displacement of poetry and its dissemination in the manner of sacred performance art. Yet, none of this is clear. In this light, it becomes less certain and precise as to the meaning of a language community – one could imagine lyric poets in the style of



Archilochus or Sappho; individual practitioners in the manner of the Orphics; a gathering of thinkers; or perhaps as a 'school' in the manner of *later* thinkers such as Plato, or even Aristotle. Of course, even the Academy began in the Agora and in the grove of *Academos*. A 'cloud of unknowing' hovers over such considerations, though it still remains probable that the Ionians – whether they had 'sung' their philosophy, in the manner of Nietzsche's telling regret with respect to *The Birth of Tragedy*, written books, or had participated in anything as formal and bureaucratic as a school – engaged in a common language game, involving a specific set of perspectives, amid a *topos* that itself was derived from the emergent context of the tragic age. This is not to suggest that such questions are irrelevant, as we will see, such considerations of *ethos*, as a way of being, and *praxis* amidst an embodied *topos* will hold primary significance for the Pythagoreans of the Oral Tradition, who cultivated an extant community of peers. Irrespective of incongruity and uncertainty with respect to these questions, it still remains possible to unfold the precise topography of the perspectives of Ionian philosophy. It will be, in this light, that we will turn to the fragment of Anaximander in a consideration of its status as a philosophical challenge to the thought of Thales, which we have sketched in the previous section.

Nietzsche lays out the following translation of the fragment (one quoted by Heidegger in his essay 'The Anaximander Fragment') in his *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*:

Whence things have their origin,  
there they must also pass away  
according to necessity;  
for they must pay penalty  
and be judged for their injustice,  
according to the ordinance of time.

Neither Nietzsche, nor Heidegger, ever lays out this fragment in the 'form' of verse, though it is clear that the fragment is amenable to this style of expression. This demonstration is only intended to underline the poetic quality of early Greek thought, and even Xenophanes, who, just as he is alleged to have 'broken' with the mytho-poetic horizons of Homer and Hesiod – as we will see in his criticisms – was a *wandering* poet who expressed, and documented, his thought in poetic works. Moving, however, beyond the exoteric aspects of style and formal expressive practise, we must listen to the fragment so as to hear its expressive perspective or articulation of its response to the 'orientalizing revolution'. In light of our earlier discussions

of the *context of emergence*, we could suggest that Anaximander was influenced, and nearly followed, Orphic thinking, as to the topography and significance, meaning of existence. As we can see, it is Time and Necessity – articulated clearly in the fragment – which orchestrate the tragic Fate of each and all, of mortals and the *Kosmos*. It will be recalled from Chapter 2, that Time and Necessity are the first elements of Orphic cosmogony. At the same time, however, Anaximander ‘transcends’ these existential ‘aspects’, through his *radical* indication of the *first* as the ‘Unlimited’ (*apeiron*, from *a-* and *peras*). This designation of the *first* ‘can’ be seen as a direct criticism of Thales. As we will recall, Thales designated a being – Water – and thus a limited, conditioned, thing as the *first* – dare we say *principle*. It is precisely such a designation that Anaximander is questioning. How can a being, one among other beings, be the Being of being? It would be in this way, with this question, that Anaximander introduces a conception of that which Heidegger will call in our own era, an *ontological difference*. This would be, in this scenario, the first articulation of this notion, one which in its primordially is accessible only to Parmenides and Heraclitus, before being consigned to the fires of *errancy* – to the ‘history of Being’. Heidegger is not precious or vain with respect to his indication of an *ontological difference* in his *Being and Time*. It is, in this way, irrelevant if Radical Orthodox theologians find an ‘ontological difference’ in Nicolas of Cusa, or even in Augustine – though it is not clear if Heidegger would give these *higher men* the ‘dignity’ of this thought. As long as there is *hope*, an ontological difference has not been expressed – *this* ontological difference is tragic. Jesus has profundity only if he is merely a man, a mortal – otherwise, his *anguish* in the Garden and his suffering upon the Cross is merely a farce.

For Anaximander, there is an abyss of difference between Being and beings, between that which, in our post-Kantian language, is a ‘condition of possibility’ and that which is just a possibility, merely actual, or, that which is *unconditioned* and the *conditioned*. Anaximander articulates a difference between Limit and the Unlimited, and existence itself is considered to be a unity of these opposites, as all things find their origin in the Unlimited as each is thrown into Limit, and through Time and Necessity (mortality) are, once again, due to their originary *hubris*, returned to the Unlimited.

In this light – and despite the Canonical narrative of ‘pre-socratic’ philosophy – there is another narrative, another version of the events, that persists, fermenting beneath the Official, Nobel Lie – of the tragic significance of Anaximander, even if we simply consider the Fate of a mortal who erupts from the Dionysian Unlimited to the Apollonian Limit, but only to return again to the undifferentiated flux of Being, Death is an ‘interdiction’

for the 'transgressions' of our 'insurrection of against nothingness' – or, in other words, this is the 'state of affairs' of our mortal, tragic existence – so as to dwell among the perspectives of Heidegger and Schürmann. One pays with death for having been born, for having introduced disorder or *recklessness* into the order of a silent *Kosmos*. We could, in light of the context of emergence, summarize the philosophy of Anaximander in terms of its perspectives on Being and Becoming. Yet, as we have intimated in light of Thales, such *normal*, 'theoretically' *clear and distinct* demarcations 'collapse' amidst the *modus operandi* and utter *thanatos* of existence. We can 'speak' of a *first* which is 'the' Unlimited, and in terms of the relation of 'One and Many', as that of a 'nexus' of the Unlimited and Limited. We can also, with respect to the question of becoming, infer the cyclical metamorphosis of the Elements amid the situation of limit and oppositions, all within an original unity of Limit and the Unlimited. The primary questions of the 'motive force' of transformation is, of course, that of the 'tuneful adjustment' of 'Time' (intimating Heidegger, in this context) amid the 'constraints', limits of necessity. Of course, the tragic situation of existence amidst its eternal recurrence throws dynamite into the 'matrix' of certainties which only revolve around notions of Forms and instantiations, substance and attributes, *matheme* and contingency. In other words, this *That* of Being as Becoming – precedes these *signifiers* of Scholastic *essentia* and *existentia*, of the merely 'what' and the 'how'. It is the 'uncertainty' of the tragic which 'makes sense' of the fragment of Anaximander, not only with respect to its 'general economy', but also, with regards to his specific (and 'inferred') criticism of Thales, as he located the *source of existence* in *a* being, one of a stable identity, in an *onto-theology*. Of course, we will admit, in the *spirit of uncertainty*, that this could be a wholly *spurious* reading of Thales – and of Anaximander.

## Chapter 7

# Recoiling from the Abyss: Anaximenes and Xenophanes

We have intimated the possibility of a ‘conversation’ – the narrative of the Ionian philosophers – yet, there is no indication that Thales ever responded to Anaximander, although, if there had been a relationship of *paidos*, we could have expected some type of documentation. There ‘is’ none, however, not a trace. *This* indicates ‘nothing’ *in itself*. It would seem that we are *mired* in the doxographic tradition – yet, this may be our predicament, but a radical ‘freedom’ seethes upon the topographies of interpretation. Such freedom, however, does not excuse us from the *sacred* injunction to *truth* that is the ‘commitment’, *ethos* and *praxis* of philosophical thought. Freedom is truth, as we may say, and show. Even Hesiod takes *liberties* with Homer, and the *Tragics* take *excessive* liberties amid their own context of emergence – through a ‘makeshift’ *art* that intimates the grand, though tenuous marriage of ‘Apollonian’ and ‘Dionysian’ *powers*, tendencies of poetry, art and music, but also, of early Greek thought ‘itself’ (as Cicero tells us, Aeschylus was a disciple of Pythagoras, for instance). We are, as mortals, compelled to listen, to enter, engage the ‘conversation’ – to be Open to the ‘next’ voice. It is, in this spirit, that our current study must turn to the *next voice*, that of Anaximenes.

### Anaximenes of Melitus (585–528 BC)

Anaximenes, said to be a younger contemporary of Thales and Anaximander, entered into the conversation (if not a community) of philosophers with his engagements with both of his predecessors. It may seem that he agreed with Anaximander on the limitedness of Water as a first principle, but was not prone to accept Anaximander’s complete desensualization in his doctrine of the Unlimited – although he shows that he comprehends the intentionality and significance of the *apeiron*. It is possible

that Anaximander's Unlimited was seen as an abysmal threat to the notion of an intimacy of existence in its emergence into a 'tragic' Destiny and Fate – or, of an existence that has a *common* Being. At the same time – Anaximenes, in the manner of Hesiod, sought to find a *first* one which would emulate the Unlimited, the infinite, without itself 'transcending' the horizons of the *Kosmos*. Anaximenes laid out, in this way, a 'system' which made Air the first, One, in relation to the Many, which were the other elements. He set out, moreover, an ingenious explanation for the motive force of existence in his specification of the transmutation of the Elements through a 'process' of rarefaction and condensation of the respective Elements (abbreviated 'gods'), such as Air (itself regarded as a 'God'), if rarefied, becomes Fire, but if condensed, turns to Wind, and then Water – if this is further condensed – it becomes Earth. This *topos*, playspace, of rarefaction and condensation throws into relief, not only the cyclical, or, perhaps spirical, recurrence of existence – as Being – but also, *this* 'unity' of ecstatic life as assured by the primordial element, Air.

The two most essential fragments of Anaximenes – of the four available are:

Fragment 2 – 'As our soul, being air, holds us together, so do breath and air surround the whole universe.'

Fragment 3 – 'Air is near to the incorporeal; and since we come into being by an efflux from this (air), it is bound to be both non-limited and rich so that it never fails.'

It is interesting that Anaximenes is clearly influenced by Thales and Anaximander, though he seems to be charting out a novel perspective of his own – one respectful of his predecessors as to their perspectives and limitations, one perhaps influenced by the Orphic tenet of the soul or spirit (*psyche*) as breath (*pneuma*), which, can be regarded as a contextually significant and, thus, meaningful intimation of the later notion of *logos* (voice, as we will see in Heraclitus). Kirk suggests in *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, that, in respect of Air (*Aēr*), it would be anachronistic to understand this notion, in relation to a notion of *pneuma* (as breath), in the sense of soul – as in the manner of Plato, Aristotle or in the later sense of the neo-platonists. Kirk in this light suggests an interpretive strategy that would rely on a concept of naturalness, of an early, almost remedial philosophy in which is articulated a rudimentary physical theory. The great irony, of course, in light of our current study, is that such a seemingly 'simple', and, thus, unproblematic, conception of 'naturalness', 'naivety' is itself anachronistic,

and, one that relies not only upon the judgement that the so-called 'pre-socratics' are rudimentary, uncouth, with respect to Plato and Aristotle, but also can be judged by our own era which has achieved the scientific standpoint, the truth of the Real. Besides his own admirable sifting-through of the various anachronisms surrounding Anaximenes, and of his rather honest *confession* that we know little of the latter, Kirk does not mention the Orphics in this context (though he does indicate the possibility that 'soul' as breath, may have some relation to Homer). It is clear that the Orphics, who both precede Homer and Hesiod, and are clearly contemporaneous with the *philosophers of the tragic age*, had already developed a sophisticated notion of the 'soul' in its transmigration. We have already discerned a clear *family resemblance* between the fragment of Anaximander and Dionysian mytho-poetic tendencies. It would thus be quite plausible, in light of not only the contention that Anaximenes was a 'student' of Anaximander, but also, of the explicit deferral to the latter with respect to the in-finite character of Air, and of a *Kosmos* that is a living, breathing 'organism', that the possibility of an Orphic (and Hesiodic) *topos* of influence must remain in play. It is, thus, in this context, recommended that the Dionysian, or Orphic trajectories of the *context of emergence* be 'fundamental' to any interpretation of early 'Greek' thinking, of archaic, tragic thought.

As a *digression* – it is interesting that Luce Irigaray contemplates the *forgetfulness* of Air in relation to Heidegger's emphasis upon Earth, of concealment and finitude – the destiny of all Apollonian 'worlds'. Irigaray, in her endless pursuit of Ariadne's thread of 'difference', seeks to intimate a notion of the infinite in relation to a *feminine* sense of the sacred. Air – as we have witnessed in Anaximenes, this indefinable, fluidic, poetic openness (cf. Derrida's *Of Spirit*) – intimates that opening which resists the concealing and annihilating powers of Earth with her tainted, and tortured, relations with Hades. It is this entanglement of Earth with the duplicity of Nature and Death, of the tragic daughter of Earth, Persephone, which discloses the character of Schopenhauer's *misogyny*, as the 'fruits' of woman always die – *they* come to fruition from the *flowers of evil*. The 'gift' of woman – is it a gift? – is that of death. Yet, we may ask, what of the other elements, those of Fire, Water and Air which as elements of the All (*Pan*), thread themselves amid the textures of existence – what of Her, in her relation to Water, Fire and Air – *what* of the suppressed elements – *what* of the suppressed possibilities, aspects, of existence? *What* other possibilities, aspects, exist for Woman, for Truth?

Of course – Irigaray's argument may be questioned, not so much in terms of her *hope* – but in terms of her decision to accuse Heidegger of the

forgetfulness of Air. Indeed, it will be granted that Heidegger does not regard Anaximenes as a primordial philosopher, thinker – but it not at all clear that he has forgotten Air. Of course, we are dancing amid the fateful play of metaphor, and the issue, in this light, is that of the infinite – not just as such, but also in terms of the traditional (patriarchal) identification of Woman as Earth – as passive, finite – or as we have intimated, as death or at least in league with death, however reluctantly. Though this, in itself, may invite an exploration of her reluctance in light of her ‘hidden’ hope for the infinite. Yet, such a discourse would be to remain *within* Emmanuel Levinas’s negative assessment of Heidegger’s early philosophy, which was a radical phenomenology of original, ecstatic temporality.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that Heidegger’s later thought – after the ‘turn’ (*Kehre*) – suspends, as did the Romantics, the transcendental *subjection* of the merely *reflexive* standpoint. Not only does the indication of *Aletheia* require a *topos* of Openness (Trakl) amid the *metontological* dispersive terrain of existence, but also – and obviously – the very notion of the Fourfold inaugurates Sky as basic, as a chord in the texture of the dissemination of the All. At the same time – Heidegger defers any hope of the infinite for mortals, as such a concern transcends the thought of Being in this moment, though even his notion of *mineness* in his early work would certainly pertain to any reading (even a ‘second reading’ ala Derrida) of *Being and Time*, including those who ‘identify’ themselves as ‘female’.

### Xenophanes of Colophon (570–475 BC)

Xenophanes, despite the fact that he was a wandering poet, is ‘traditionally’ regarded, as is outlined by Kirk, having enacted an explicit break with traditional mythological practise, and is often seen as a forerunner not only to the ‘scientific’ denunciation of theology, but also, to Platonic and neo-Platonic thought – and thus, to Christian theology – or, at the very least to some form of ‘monotontheism’ (Nietzsche). The assertion of a break with ‘tradition’, with the narrative of ‘convention’, is based upon his criticisms of Homer and Hesiod, as in Fragments 10–13, his deconstruction of Myth, Fragments 15–16, his notion of a hegemonic Zeus not like mortals in body or mind, Fragments 23–24, in his echo of Theognis as to the ‘subjectivism’ of god-creation, and his criticism of Pythagoras, with his doctrine of transmigration in his ‘story of the puppy’. Yet, what sort of a ‘break’ would this be, even if we admit its existence? Is it a ‘clean’ break – an inexplicable novelty, which we may perhaps intimate with a reference to the ‘poetry’ of

the *dadaist* Hugo Ball – an *epoche* of utter ‘breach’, oblivion? Or, may we cast into relief a more likely, plausible, more comprehending interpretation his poetic-philosophy, one which ‘it is said’ that he *performed*, as a continuation of the conversation that was initiated by the first three Ionians – itself a conversation that sustained the context of emergence of earlier mytho-poetic tradition, before the alleged ‘dawn’?

That there was *not* such a comprehensive break can be seen not only with respect to a decided proclivity to poetic utterance on the part of Xenophanes, but also with his dwelling in the mytho-poetic world of early Greek and Mediterranean existence, in the lifeworld of which there is overwhelming evidence of its continuous existence and expression. Indeed, if there is such a break – not only with respect to Xenophanes, but also with the entire ‘tradition’ of early ‘Greek’ thought, we would expect to witness a radical shedding of the elements and horizons of the asethetico-poetics of the previous epochal economy, of the expressivity of its lifeworld, of its language (games) as its house of Being. However, again, there is no evidence of such a breach, even in Xenophanes. We can look to his contemporaries – Pherecydes, for instance, who wrote a theogony, which stated that Zeus and Time always existed (Freeman, p. 14, Frs. 1–3). There was also Acusilaus of Argos, and others. It is well into the ‘time’ of Heraclitus, around the turn of the fifth century BC, that Epimenides of Crete continued in the mythical tradition. Finally, lest we believe that Xenophanes is contesting the ‘literalist’ existence of the Gods, in the manner of philistine, fundamentalist ‘atheists’, we could consider a contemporary of the latter, Theagenes (529–30 BC), who had already cast forth an ‘allegorical’ interpretation of the poly-theology of Homer. Xenophanes, we could instead argue, still abiding the context of emergence, is, nevertheless concerned with an ‘ethical’ conception of divinity which is pure and untainted by the practises of mortals.

It seems certain that Xenophanes is traversing across the same context of significance as were the other Ionians – each of which, admittedly (though we cannot be sure), developing ‘beyond’ the mere poetics of Apollonian epic and lyric. The latter itself intimates the intimate experience of Dionysian ecstatic – that was already always there. We could suppose, perhaps, that the strictures of the mytho-poetic tradition – and of its *topos* of dissemination amid sacred festivals, had begun to be displaced, transfigured by the novel conversation of ‘philosophers’, seekers after the Truth. Yet, as Kirk says a thousand times, this is hypothetical, conjecture, in that it is also possible that there were poet-thinkers who had performed their poetic works, at the many sacred festivals of the archaic lifeworld. Such a possibility would seem to be more likely perhaps in the sixth century, the era of the oral



tradition, but even the fifth century would be conducive to such a possibility – think of Pindar – despite the conventional wisdom that the Pythagoreans, themselves devotees of the oral tradition, had established a ‘school’ in southern Italy. What did they *really* do to provoke the ‘Pythagorean’ riots?

Nevertheless – and as we have intimated, the radical criticisms of Xenophanes against the Homeric and Hesiodic tradition are ultimately motivated by his own intervention into the philosophical *topos* which is characterized by the elements of the *context of emergence*. For instance, his doctrine of *the first* is oriented around the element of Earth, from which, he says, in a manner similar to Anaximander, all things arise, and to which all things will return. Life itself arises from the joining of Earth and Water, an Orphic notion. We could also suppose a ‘cycle of elements’ which is part and parcel of all early ‘Greek’ thought. At the same time, however, his notion of the ‘motive force’ may lead us to detect the ‘specificity’ of his thought. Xenophanes contends that there is, in opposition to Homer and Hesiod, one ‘God’ (although he never explicitly casts the existence of gods and goddesses into question), who is not an ‘anthropomorphical’ deity in the *classic* sense in that it, in the manner of a Dionysian pantheism ‘stretches everywhere’. It is through the thoughts of *Pan*, the sacred All, *Deus*, that all things move, arise and return – to the Earth, Gaia. Anticipating Parmenides and Anaxagoras – echoing Thales’ notion that ‘gods are in everything’, he articulates the existence, life of a divine power, as the primal motive force that ‘is’ – though, as ‘gods’, ‘time’, ‘soul’ – a non-anthropomorphic ‘god’. Such a ‘god’ is accessible to our comprehension in light of the context of emergence, regardless of the susceptibility of such a contention – amplified via the *scientistic* interpretation of Xenophanes – to a narrative, which would contend that this power, this God, is distinct from existence, in the manner of the word of Christianity. There is thus the question of the location of this one God and of its relation to the finite world, and thus, of a novel ‘pantheism controversy’.

Regardless of the controversies of all of tomorrow’s parties, we may be confident, that *Mythos* did not disappear all at once with Xenophanes, or even *in* Xenophanes and that such a narrative is sterile, leading to a dead end – as the greatest myth is that of the ‘absence of myth’ (Bataille). There is much more ‘going on’ in early Greek thought – *problematics* that we have, in our current era, only begun to catch a glimpse. Myth does not ‘disappear’, but threads itself in ever novel ways into other narratives, whether tragedy in thought or poetry – in the manner of Aeschylus or Sophocles, or in the dissemination of early ‘Greek’ thought. Indeed, it could be argued that Xenophanes simply created a *new variation of the tragic myth*.

## Chapter 8

### ‘All is Flux’ – Heraclitus of Epheus (535–475 BC)

In a significant way, many of the ‘difficulties’ we have faced with an interpretation of the earliest Ionians, Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes and Xenophanes (in reference to the scarcity of source material) are partially alleviated with the extant fragments of Heraclitus. In his corpus, we have a significant body of statements and indications which are ‘wide-ranging’ and which transcend the otherwise *extant* ‘paucity’ of his predecessors. Moreover, Heraclitus explicitly mentions and criticizes his predecessors and contemporaries, those players amidst a lifeworld: the poets Homer (42, 56, 105), Archilochus (42) and Hesiod (57, 106), but also the philosophers Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus (40). From amid these criticisms, we can begin to trace out a radical ‘continuity’ of horizons of background meaning, the *topos*, for an interpretation of these thinkers. Heraclitus also mocks as distractions from the truth these vulgar ‘religious’ practices of idolatry. Yet, at the same time, intensifies his affirmation of the divine that conceals itself deep within such practices. (5, 13, 14, 15)

All the same, in his disclosure of the meaning of existence and being, he does not dismantle the polytheistic topography of his predecessors but re-interprets this terrain according to his own philosophical perspective, one that abides the archaic Mediterranean *lifeworld* as its dwelling, its ‘house of Being’. In the fragments of Heraclitus, each and all of the ‘players’, evoked in the earliest poetic ‘theogonies’, are still in play, such as Zeus, Apollo, Fate, Death . . . At the same time, his interpretation amends these theogonies, perhaps, in light of some of the teachings of Xenophanes, who it will be remembered declared that the divine was without mind and body and was one, that it *stretched everywhere*. Heraclitus takes up this persistent trope that All is One, but makes this one the *Kosmos* itself – though the

meaning of *this* is *hidden*. The latter is not the ‘product’ of gods or man, but *is* everlasting Fire. Heraclitus states:

This ordered universe (Cosmos), which is the same for all, was not created by any of the gods or of mankind, but it was ever and is and shall be everliving Fire, kindled in measure and quenched in measure. (30)

From this indication, we can suggest that Heraclitus *disrupts* in his transgression of the generative discourse of the ‘tradition’ of the Orphic, Hesiodic and Ionian *question of the first*. He intimates the transformations of fire throughout the circle of the Kosmos – there is *no beginning* – and even as there are ‘Elements’, these abbreviated gods, there are no Apollonian beings, but phases of transition, indicated and orchestrated by the *logos*, the *voice* immanent to Being, though covered over, rendered false (*pseudos*) by this domain of reification, of objectification. Yet, such a gesture still abides the hours of being of the question of the first, giving its own answer. Our ‘deceptive ordering of words’ notwithstanding – there is again no ‘breach’, regardless of the *mysticism* of Cratylus.

Heraclitus indicates this change further through the metaphor of flux, and of the river. ‘In the same river, we both step and do not step, we are and we are not’. (49a). And, ‘Those who step into the same river have different waters flowing ever around them.’ All is flux, is in constant movement, one cannot step into the same river twice (12, 49, 91). The sense of change is further expounded in the statements that time is a child playing with dice (52), that Fate (death) rules all life (20), and that the sun is new every day. (6) He states: “Fire lives the death of earth, and air lives the death of fire; water lives the death of air, earth that of water.” (76) In this way, this fire, this Kosmos, although One, in a manner yet to be articulated, is a *topos* of change, and of an eternally recurrent change in the Orphic sense.

However, for the *awakened* one, Heraclitus states that – irrespective of the flux, of the river of existence, of the pure Dionysian–Apollonian scintillations of mortal perspective, truth is possible as an *episteme* that is rooted in the hidden Law (*logos*) of the world, one which is disclosed as that voice that brings ‘unity’ to the flux. (1, 2) Zeus is being called in to take care of his terrible children.

To most mortals, Heraclitus states, this Law (*logos*), that which is one and common to all, is sequestered to a ‘private’ existence and language (1). He says that ‘nature loves to hide’ (123), and the harmony of the world is a hidden harmony (54). Heraclitus writes:

Of the Logos which is as I describe it men always prove to be uncomprehending, both before they have heard it and when once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Logos men are like people of no experience, even when they experience such words and deeds as I explain, when I distinguish each thing according to its constitution and declare how it is; but the rest of men fail to notice what they do after they wake up just as they forget what they do when asleep. (1)

The Law (*logos*) is the thunderbolt (Zeus) that 'steers all things' (64). In this way, the oneness of the Kosmos is articulated through the oneness of the Law. Yet, this oneness of the Law is not a simple unity, but is involved intimately in the flux of existence. In distinction to his predecessors, Heraclitus seems to have removed himself decidedly from 'creation' Myths, or, of 'way of speaking' as Plotinus alludes in his *Enneads*. He has also moved away from the various designations of the *first*, whether this be a being or an nothing, as with Anaximander. Of course, none of these interpretations may be cogent; nevertheless, our 'decision' in respect of metaphors may force us into a box, not of our own making. We have imagined that Thales – and the others, have followed the Apollonian thread of Hesiod and Homer – with their 'first', with either a being, Water, Air, Earth, Fire – or even with the Unlimited – it remains 'our way of speaking'. Such an imagining is borne out in light of their poetic, philosophical narrative – yet, it is always a masquerade for a radical assertion, in the words of Kirk, of eternal motion. This is the Dionysian thread, that of intoxication, eroticism, death – of music – of that which contests the Apollonian order of redemption. With Heraclitus, we witness the immersion of the Dionysian into the heart of the Apollonian, an exposure of the tragic *morphe* and *hyle* of eternal recurrence, eternal motion. We could, perhaps, suggest, in this light, that Heraclitus brings the insights of Xenophanes, of a singular power, together with Anaximander's notion of the Unlimited, into the heart of *Reality* itself, as an immanent 'power' of orchestration and expression which requires neither the dogmatic existence of an *arche-onta*, nor an exogenous source of power that all too already always falls into the theism of 'our way of speaking'. It is in this way that Heraclitus experiments with language – or does he receive his poetry from the Muse – in any event, as with Heidegger's intimations in *Letter on Humanism*, a poetic lexicon and manner of laying-out, of showing and saying, may allow us to 'see aspects', that were not noticed previously, that remained covered-over, hidden in plain view, false (*pseudos*).

Yet, as the immanent, the *Logos* must deal with strange friends, a ‘unity of opposites’ that fathoms the perspectives of angels and devils. Heraclitus sets forth another metaphor:

One should know that war is general and jurisdiction is strife, and everything comes by way of strife and necessity (80).

In this light, the flux of the *Kosmos*, this change, is ‘accounted for’ on the ‘basis’ of this *logos*, which is indicated not only, *and blandly*, as a unity of opposites, such as by the tension of the lyre and the bow (51, 48), but also, as the murder, lust and desire of the singular mortal body – of the intimate perspective of the mortal, ‘one’ who abides a deep well in herself. As we will later hear from the philosophical poetry of Empedocles, it is not merely ‘Love’ that we desire, but also ‘Strife’. This is already always the predicament of mortals, and we ‘seek’ an intimate self-interpretation of existence, for all mortals, though *Pseudos* denies. This domain of Love and Strife, of tenuous individuation and the radical depths of Being (beyond the ‘principle of sufficient reason’), is a ‘house of mirrors’, though there are ‘cracks’. Heraclitus writes,

They do not understand how that which differs with itself is in agreement: harmony consists of opposing tension, like that of the bow and the lyre.

He also describes this unity or sameness in opposition with many enigmatic sayings,

God is day-night, winter summer, war-peace, satiety-famine. (67)

The way up and down is one and the same. (60)

The bow is called Life, but its work is death. (48)

Beginning and end are general in the circumference of the circle. (105)

Disease makes health pleasant and good, hunger satisfaction, weariness rest. (111)

It rests from change. (84a)

They would not know the name of Right, if these things did not exist. (23)

That which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony. (8)

In light not only of the context of emergence, but also with respect to the trajectory of Ionian thought, we could compare the *logos* of Heraclitus to the Unlimited of Anaximander (1). In both cases, these are hidden from the perspectives of the ‘private’ awareness and recklessness of mortal beings.

For Anaximander, it is the *hubris* of being born from the bloody hands of Prometheus, the mortal, human, is nothing – and nothing without the gods – there persists an orchestra of temporal attunement of 'eternal motion' – eternal recurrence – slightly punctuated by the tragic events of birth, life and death. It is not clear, beyond his poetic work, in which manner Anaximander sought to disseminate his insights to other mortals (yet, we have not ruled out performance, participation in sacred festivals, etc.). For Heraclitus, it would seem that the *Logos* is capable of apprehension for the awakened and without such an awakening to the *Logos*, mortals will not be capable of either the deeper understanding possible for mortals or (in perhaps extreme cases, such as Empedocles) understanding as the divinity (1, 2, 78). In this way, it would seem to suggest that it is the experience of the paradoxes in his poetry that were, for his part, intended as 'techniques of the self' for the awakening of enlightenment, of provoking one of no experience or of merely private perspective to conceive of the whole, of the All, of the depths of the soul. Heraclitus states, 'To God, all things are beautiful, good and just; but men have assumed some things to be unjust, other just.' (102) It would seem to be indeed impossible to ever fathom the ends of the Law (*Logos*), since most of us are asleep (26) or are well-fed cattle (29):

You could not in your going find the ends of the soul though you travelled the whole way: so deep is its Law (*logos*). (45)

And,

The Law (*Logos*): though men associate with it most closely, yet they are separated from it, and those things which they encounter daily seem to them strange. (72)

To this extent, for the mortal, he honours sight, hearing and knowledge (55).

Amid these 'techniques' of the mortal being, we apprehend that the Law (*logos*) is, and can be seen to be, the source for mortal law, *logos* (*nomos*). *Logos* is the overwhelming (*ab*) ground for the unity of that which exists and we must fight to preserve this law, as that which is, after all, common to all, as if it were our city walls. (114) In this light, for Heraclitus:

That which is wise is one: to understand the purpose which steers all things through all things. (41)

That which alone is wise is one: it is willing and unwilling to be called by the name of Zeus. (32)

Heraclitus states that the *Logos* is common to all, and that all mortal intimates are capable of knowing themselves and of acting with moderation – of disclosing to oneself amidst an intimate hermeneutics of one's own existence, the discovery and articulation of the *Logos* (113, 116, 115), which abides as the soul, and, can be interpreted as an indication, or, intimation, of the divine. (93) Heraclitus discloses that he 'searched into himself', and, in the light of the unlimited depths of the *logos*, that he found that 'moderation is the greatest virtue, and wisdom is to speak the truth and to act according to nature.' (112) Heidegger would be the first in line if I asked someone to suggest the last phrase to be a forgery. Indeed, it sounds radically wrong – yet, what is it *saying, showing*? Moderation must mean mortality, or, of the insights of excess, of going 'too far' – wisdom – an intimate self-interpretation – act 'according to nature' . . . tragic affirmation of an immanent awakening, annihilation to the divine as *phusis, moira, alethea, logos*.

Heraclitus is a Dionysian poet and philosopher, he invokes the tragic 'experience' with his every breath. The trajectory of his thought intimates the metontology and met-aesthetics, met-art, of becoming that which was denied as *hubris* under the sway of Homer and Hesiod, a threatened 'identity'. Anaximander radically evokes in his tragic poetry – and comedy – this 'insurrection against nothingness', this *freedom* . . .

leave it to the wind –  
 it is better to live  
 than not to live – yet,  
 it is better to die at the right time . . .

### The Ionians: Recapitulation

2) Anaximander      Unlimited  
 Time as tuneful adjustment  
 Time and Necessity

- |               |                              |               |   |
|---------------|------------------------------|---------------|---|
| 1) Thales     | Water                        | 4) Xenophanes | Earth   |
|               | 'Gods are in everything'     |               | 'All moves with the thoughts of God'                    |
| 3) Anaximenes | Air                          | 5) Heraclitus | Fire  |
|               | Rarefaction/<br>Condensation |               | 'thunderbolt steers are things'<br>'unity of opposites' |

Of course, we persist in a cloud of unknowing. It all seems a bit too contrived. Granted – we have already called into question nearly everything – of all tomorrow's anachronisms, of basic *pseudos* in the *face* of nearly everyone. Yet, beyond the motif of the dawn and its variegated surrogates, there explode much deeper – metaphilosophical – questions as to the very meaning and practice of philosophy. All of the so-called 'pre-socratics' were poets, at the very least, at least until the second generation Anaxagoras put his book up for sale in Athens for one Drachma. What did they do before? Pythagoras persisted amid the oral tradition, as a community – and reticent to the practise of the orgiastic, communal Dionysians (the Orphics were, according to Gurthrie, solitary practitioners). It is clear that the other 'philosophers' were not simply loners who picked up the arrow that they find in the forest – many were asked to enact 'constitutions' for *peoples*, but in most cases refused. What does this mean? We must call into question, not only the 'successionist' 'first' 'philosophers', but also, 'Greek', 'Western', philosophy, itself, one that denies its roots, as, in the first instance, in a Mediterranean *lifeworld*.



## Chapter 9

# The Eternal Recurrence of the Soul: Pythagoras of Samos

### Pythagoras (570–495 BC) – ‘*Philosophy in the West*’

The strange thing, as we have noticed, is that none of the early ‘Greek thinkers’, ‘philosophers’, either ever set foot in Greece or were simply not ‘Greek’ – if this even *is* a meaning amid this temporal epoch – it surely had no meaning for Homer and Hesiod, or *perhaps* we cannot tell one way or another with respect to the Lyric poets. We ‘have it’ on *convention, tradition* that Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Xenophanes and Heraclitus were all from Ionia, which is in Asia Minor, on the west coast of modern Turkey. ‘Philosophy’ then *shoots* to the ‘West’ for Kirk and others, to southern Italy and the Pythagorean *bios*. Indeed, it is said that Pythagoras first expressed the word *philosophia*. Much is lost with such radical shifts – ‘what’ is philosophy? Parmenides, from Elea, on the southern coast of Italy – Empedocles lived in Sicily, ending his life with his plunge into Aetna – Anaxagoras, back to Ionia, disseminated *this* philosophy to and in Athens, the first early ‘Greek’ philosopher to travel to the Agora. Democritus was from Abdera, in Thrace, the *topos* of Nietzsche’s ‘witch’s brew’.

Pythagoras, it is said, cultivated a *bios* of ‘existence, one that leaves no ‘trace’, given not only its ‘rooted’ existence in the oral tradition, but also, in light of the *spare artefacts* of its *topos* of existential *praxis*, for example, the monochord, etc.

Yet – ‘this’ – our ‘information’ remains an *image* of *being* and *becoming* of the *mortal* – mere ‘analytic concepts’, without meaning, remaining *divorced* from their own topography of emergence, from the ‘event’, as indicated, in this context, in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls (or, as we have exposed – any of the myriad variations of eternal recurrence, of the ‘tragic myth’). What is the scenario of our *death*? – each and all of these ‘philosophies’ imply and orchestrate ‘death’, my death, your death, there is no exit,

no escape, *that is tragedy – this* – a synthesis of the Ionians – fruition . . . Transmigration implies, enacts, death, life and rebirth – but, also leaf like change. Philosophy – as so many have said – is a preparation for death.

It was Cicero, in his *Tusculanae Quaestiones* claimed that Aeschylus was a follower of Pythagoras,<sup>1</sup> who was pointed out by Nietzsche to be one of the seminal thinkers of tragic sixth-century Greece.<sup>2</sup> As I have recently argued in my work *Pythagoras and the Doctrine of Transmigration: Wandering Souls*, the affiliation of the Pythagoreans with tragic poetry, thought – with the tragic myth, allowed us to set forth a re-interpretation of the Pythagoreans and of their significance with respect to the meta-narrative of early Greek thought. The main result of this re-interpretation was that of severing the conventional affiliation of Pythagorean philosophy with Plato and Platonism – and hence, Christianity. Nietzsche himself makes this precise charge against Pythagoras (and Orpheus), and regarded him as a ‘tyrant of the spirit’ and as merely a religious reformer. Nevertheless, if we consider the Pythagorean philosophy under the aspect of the tragic, and in light of our genealogy of the context of emergence, then it will be possible to regard Pythagorean philosophy, exemplified by the mytho-poetics of the doctrine of transmigration, as, with the Ionians, an exponent of the tragic myth. Pythagoras, as recorded in the *Golden Verses*, makes it clear that Apollo is their patron divinity, and that our first duty is to honour the gods. Such an invocation is consistent with Homer and Hesiod in the Apollonian tradition or thread of the context of emergence. At the same time, as with the Ionians, the teaching of Pythagoras abided the ‘Orphic’ strand as exhibited in its narrative of the transmigration of souls – of the emergence or opening from the All, and of the eventual return to the All. The eventuality is mediated by the successive incarnations or embodiments, of the myriad transmigrations. As I have argued, it would be problematic to either regard this aspect of the teaching of Pythagoras as either false, a ‘cure by lies’, or a primitive vestige from a non-scientific mythical culture. I have furthermore contended that it would be misleading if we simply and uncritically identified the Pythagorean doctrine of transmigration as one with other variations of this mythological thematic – for instance, with that of Buddhism, or even with that of Platonic *metempsychosis*. It is simply not clear if the Pythagoreans maintained a sense of transmigration that would either be punitive, based upon some notion of ‘justice’, or if they somehow regarded the processual event of transmigration itself as either suffering or punishment, or in other words, as a situation or predicament from which the soul would wish to be released from the *topos* of the ultimate double bind. Indeed, as I have argued, the event of

existence and the pathway of return was conceived by the Pythagoreans as a *praxis*, a *bios*, of 'attunement' (*ethos*) with the *Kosmos*, orchestrated 'in' the domain of mortality, amidst the *topos* of the body. The significance of the body exhibits a continuity with the valorization of life in Homer, as we have seen, in Chapter 2, in 'A Gathering of Shades'. Yet, contrary to the claims of Cornford, it would seem that the 'revolution' that was undertaken by Pythagoras was, again, that of a marriage of Apollonian 'individuation' with the 'communion' of his half-brother Dionysus, amidst the eternal recurrence of Near Eastern 'Orphicism'. It may remain questionable whether Pythagoras, amid an act of *hubris*, would have advocated a return to a god, and of the concomitant dissolution of the mortal/immortal divide. From the perspective of the context of emergence, the domain of mortality, of body, individuation and finitude – of strife (Empedocles), recklessness (Anaximander) is an upsurge of the All into the Each, of the Dionysian music of the spheres into a dream image of the tragic singular being. Pythagoras is not intent upon denying mortality or the sensuous life of the body – indeed, even the All itself 'dies' in the manner of a recurrent great year of conflagration. Yet, there is an ingenious 'logic' in the meta-narrative of transmigration in Pythagoras. Not only is the myth 'useful' as a mnemotechnic device which acts as the mytho-poetic dwelling of a philosophical teaching disseminated amid the Oral tradition, but in terms of its own texture and content, it lays out the *topos* of possibility for a tragic irony of *wisdom*, one that need not concern 'punishment' – nor annihilation – but *enlightenment*, of a return to the All, which would allow for insight and remembrance of the greater self (the myriad spirits gathered throughout the transmigrations). Nevertheless, such a notion of return to the All – while it may be merely 'ironic' in the manner of Friedrich Schlegel and Hölderlin – is not seeking an escape from mortality in the sense of a transcendence of finitude in the manner of Plato or Christianity. Pythagoras remains within a tragic context, in the sense that the return – from the Apollonian *topos* of individuation – to an All – to the Dionysian – neither seeks escape, nor does it express its desperation in the face of recurrent transmigrations. This constant dissolution of merely individual identity is tragic, in the sense of breaking through the veil of Maya, of objectification, merely 'private' awareness toward an openness to the oneness of Being, to the All. To this extent, there are many stark similarities with the Ionians, not only in the delineation of the temporal world in terms of the many oppositions and elements of existence, but also of their eternal recurrence, of the event of the All as the context for a poetico-phenomenological disclosure of the truth of existence. At the same time – and this comment is tagged

with the 'stipulation' that we do not have any reliable evidence – it would seem plausible that the *modus vivendi* of the Pythagoreans would differ significantly, for instance, from Heraclitus, who reflects upon the same problematic of merely Apollonian, of the stultified private awareness which is forbidden access to the Logos. Heraclitus implores us to follow him in an exploration of the unfathomable depths of the self, while it would seem that Pythagoras – whom Heraclitus criticizes as knowing nothing despite his vast education – counsels us not only to explore the self, in terms of a remembrance of the myriad transmigrations of the greater self, but also to enact a community, a *bios, ethos*, a way of life, with the purpose of not merely knowing the One, but becoming and being the All. It is clear, however, that despite the possible differences, that the philosophy of the Ionians, and that of the Pythagoreans is illuminated through its contextualization under the aspect of tragic thought. The attempt by the interpreters of the scientific twentieth century, who have insisted on severing the 'mystical' and 'scientific' currents of Pythagorean philosophy have ironically cast before our interpretive gaze a boundary, a wall, which has had the result of a near erasure of an indigenous, tragic interpretation of sixth-century Pythagorean philosophy and *praxis*. With the recuperation of this hermeneutical possibility not only is it possible to reconsider the role and significance of 'scientific' aspects in Pythagorean philosophy (and in early Greek thinking as such), but also to raise the question – as Nietzsche had enacted in his *The Birth of Tragedy* – of the relationship of 'science' and 'philosophy', through *the lens of art*, which in the present context, is that of the mytho-poetic horizons for the emergence of philosophical thought. As we have seen earlier, the Babylonians seemed to have no problem in the *development* of their mathematical and astronomical thought (of 'science') with the status of their culture as mytho-poetical with respect to their orientational meta-narratives. Indeed, that which we vivisection from the tapestry of life and label 'science' acquires its sense, and significance, as an aspect of the mytho-poetic *topos* of a culture – even in our own. We must ask the question: why should such a mytho-poetic dwelling for philosophical (even 'scientific thought') be 'problematic' for the Pythagoreans, or, for any philosophy or philosopher (think of Albert Camus, Giordano Bruno, for instance) We must address, in this light, the elephant which ceaselessly lurks in our room, which seems to be the same elephant that Russell sought to deny to Wittgenstein. The elephant's name was and is, of course, the 'scientific worldview'. As with Badiou, who, like a Maoist Pied Piper, seducing his readers to a logical, mathematical and scientific philosophy, seems bent upon resurrecting the worst fallacies of 'logical positivism', the

propagandists of the scientific standpoint regard themselves, proudly, as Titans, as modern day instantiations of Prometheus, who have broken cleanly, decisively from Myth – and poetry – and, whose ‘science’ stands – ‘face to face’ – with Reality. With the hegemony of such an ‘ideology’ in academia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, our entire ‘education’ in philosophy has been ‘mutated’ into the image of the ‘theoretical man’ – of the merely Apollonian, and of a caricature of ‘Apollo’, of the one who broke free from the Earth with his ‘escape’ from the ‘barren’ island of Delos.

Yet, the elephant is still in the room, and though its impact may seem to be waning, it is clear that the damage has been done – and that all of us are – if we are not still ‘hypnotized’ by the spell of the scientific worldview – convalescents of this *reckless* onslaught upon human wisdom, knowledge and memory.

Regardless of the arrogance of such presumption, there remain serious concerns with respect to the deep damage done to philosophy, its meaning and the horizons ‘propadeutics’ of philosophy – indeed, the very meaning of ‘philosophy’ – its fields of study – and those ‘beyond’ philosophy which have not yet benefited from such thoughtfulness of an ‘authentic’ event and tradition of thought. For what is an education in philosophy today – is it not asleep?

Is it the *Ethos* of the Pythagoreans, of five years of silence, contemplation, the way of life, nutrition, walks, ‘magical’ *symbola*, conversation, music – the ‘common’ pursuit of the All in a community which held possessions in common?

‘Our’ philosophy is a discipline, an academic offering, a *fetish* – one though that is not out of touch with the concerns of the body – however, our ‘meta-philosophical horizons’ have been tainted and distorted by the *revolution* of our fathers, by the scientific worldview. What do we study? What do we do? Our education consists in a bizarre dose of ‘epistemology’ at the very early stages (born grey haired), and in the modern tradition – always beginning with Descartes – we also take a look at Plato and Aristotle, and if we are lucky, we are force fed an anachronistic rendition of the early Greek thinkers – dressed as the ‘pre-socratic philosophers’. Some of the most lucky get to consider the insurgencies of Continental philosophy, Kant and his successors, Nietzsche, Heidegger and the philosophical controversies of the twentieth century – though not in relation to the Analytic stream, which calmly courses on in utter oblivion to the desperation and urgency of the Continental debates and dramas. This picture in itself shows a state of affairs that is far from satisfying, one may even contend that ‘philosophy’ is in a

state of decadence, with its petty, sectarian divisions and its routinization according to the manner of the contemporary, business-oriented academia. Yet, the situation is not merely decadent – it is dangerous in that we have not only forgotten the ‘impetus’ for philosophical questioning, but have also limited our perspective – in light of the ideology of the ‘scientific world-view’ to such an extent that we have now become vulnerable to radical criticisms of philosophy, from not only the usual quarters of ‘religion’, but also, from that of ‘science’ itself. The latter, as it was recently expressed by Stephen Hawking<sup>3</sup>, takes the manner of a denial, that ‘philosophy is dead’. In other words, philosophy and its cold practices are no longer necessary – ‘science’ can now answer all the important questions first posed by philosophy. Yet, such a judgement – though apparently blind to the entire ‘import’ of the Continental stream – was pre-figured by the ‘logical positivists’ – and, especially by Carnap – who sought to *prostitute* the *goddess of truth* to be the washer-woman and slave of ‘science’, as the reflective and critical perspective which would analyse the propositions of ‘science’ as to their cogency and coherence. Such a philosophy is no longer necessary – not even by the idol to which it had given supplications – *that* philosophy is dead. Indeed, even though Hawking regurgitates so much ‘metaphysics’ – to which he is completely unaware (he needs ‘philosophy’ badly), his pronouncement shows that his type of ‘scientist’ has no concern for ‘philosophy’, in any of its variations. We can be grateful that he is not the only ‘scientist’ – yet, we can sigh when such types, as with Richard Dawkins and Peter Singer cast shame and embarrassment upon *philosophy* with their ‘sophistries’.

So it is clear that ‘philosophy is dead’ . . . Nietzsche and most poignantly, Heidegger are already on record as to the *death of philosophy*. There have been many deaths, that of Art, of God, of Philosophy, the Author, the Subject . . . Hawking has said ‘nothing’ at all ‘novel’ – yet, as we have intimated, his words are symptomatic of the decadence of ‘philosophy’ in our own era, a decadence to which we must respond, for there are many more dangerous enemies than the ‘scientists’ and the usual caricature and prejudice against philosophy which is perennial, as with the quip that Thales, looking toward the Sky, fell into a well – ‘historical’ meta-narratives as to the *uselessness* of philosophy. As I have intimated in the preceding, our greatest danger in the current period comes from Radical Orthodox Theology, which seeks to subjugate these remnants of philosophy back under its wing, under its hegemony, as was the case for most of European history, through the Medieval era, the Renaissance and even into the period of Kant and his predecessors – indeed, it seems that it was until Nietzsche’s declaration of the death of [God] that the ecclesiastical ‘hegemony’ was propagated, with

respect to any considerations of the *sovereignty* of philosophy. It has remained in force to this moment – and seeks its re-birth as a cultural and political power. In this way – perhaps, we can be very thankful to those, like Russell who sought to explain why they were not ‘Christians.’ Yet – these ‘Lions’ pay no heed to *this* devastating insight of Bataille – that the *greatest myth* is the *absence of Myth*. In other words, science, as a mortal art, is embedded within its own mytho-poetic horizons – *science* is a mythology of itself, of ‘theoretical man’, and the ‘optimism’ of knowledge and technological ‘progress’. Yet, ‘science’ will not oblige this insight, nor, will it seek a ‘better’, more plausible mytho-poetic horizon, such as that of eternal recurrence. ‘Science’ remains obsessed with its ‘Big Bang’ (*Strife* à la Empedocles), and the philosophers who were once washer-women seek to justify (after the humiliation of their rejection by the ‘scientists’) their pragmatic usefulness with *strategems* of ‘ethics’ and ‘applied philosophy’. But, can science become creative, be seen through the ‘lens of art’? Can ‘science’ become *that which* it is? Tragic ‘knowledge’ . . .

Nevertheless – our problems lie with ourselves, with our persistent prejudices, norms, bibliography, curriculum . . . A practical case study and exercise (for philosophers educated in the current ‘truth regime’) – a speaker confronts the ‘scientist’ with a deconstructive genealogy of the ‘modern subject’, and situates the deviation of ‘modernity’ in a misunderstanding of the philosophy of a medieval author – (or, for the Continentals, one is told that the very notion of a ‘ontological difference’ – Heidegger’s most basic thought) – *is* already thought and expressed by Nicolas of Cusa. That Meister Eckhart has already thought the *Mystical* – in a manner that would make Wittgenstein even ever more silent. Or, expressing my own hidden genealogies – of the post-Kantian disputes between the neo-Humeans, neo-Spinozans – Friedrich Jacobi, Johann Hamann, the early German, British and French, etc., Romantics – or, even, an ‘indigenous hermeneutics’ of early Greek thought – a philosophy of colonials, ex-patriots . . . Philosophy will truly die if it cannot respond to its critics, if it cannot ‘justify’ its existence. We must break out of our cave, one of our making – and one that has become dangerous to our very existence. Philosophy, as they say in the newspapers, is ‘dead’. The clerics are wetting their lips, waiting for the ‘Event’ that will put things in their proper places. Yet, irrespective of our faulty education and of the failure of philosophy to remain true to its ‘originary’ temporal *topos* of questioning, and of the *praxis* that is incited, and is attuned to a philosophical life, we still perform the remnants of a decadent ‘tradition’. For, while we may be blind to that tendency, which has been regarded by ‘us’ as ‘theology’ – and for *good* reasons – we need, in the

current impasse, to know our enemy. At the same time – and giving due weight to the intimation of a hermeneutic circle – we grasp these novel sources under a different aspect than they have been accustomed. Augustine – as a phenomenological explorer of the ecstasies of temporality – well before Husserl and Heidegger. We simply have to remove the ‘saint’ from their names so as to parade them as thinkers with a contemporary significance. We need to fathoms the ‘history of thought’, we need to fill in the gaps of our education, regardless of our prejudicial, private awareness. We cannot respond to questions with silence – unless this is a silence that matters. Not of ignorance – we need to be able to respond to the flawed accusations of the theologians before we find ourselves, through attrition, find ourselves once again under the yoke of the clerics.

Our complaisance will be our utter doom – we must invoke the question, we must ask the question, seek the truth, to ‘think’ and to ‘know’ – and ‘act’. We must live ‘what’ we ‘think’ and ‘know’, amid the ‘Event’ of an intimate *ethos*, *bios* of mortal existence. We must become philosophers, thinkers, agents (actors, performers, poets, comedians, etc.) – and not ‘business’ operatives, predators, who merely assert a *private awareness*. Pythagoras – as with Nietzsche – lays out the ‘vision and riddle’, an intimation of eternal recurrence, of a radical vision of the event of existence that dissolves our faith in entities, in idols, beyond God and gods, with the proviso that it is the All, eternal recurrence, that is an innocence of an intimate becoming.

Yet, who can speak of complacency any longer in light of broken windows, mounted hegemonies, tragic violence?



## Chapter 10

### Tragic Differing – Parmenides of Elea (Early Fifth Century)

It would seem that John Burnet is responsible for the persistent image of Parmenides as the first logician – and perhaps, in such a light, as the first authentic philosopher of the West. He not only inaugurates the specificities of the arguments set forth later by the likes of Cornford and Russell, but also, through his emphasis upon the ‘method of argument’, one of the ‘utmost rigour’, suggests yet another ‘epistemological break’ in the tradition of early Greek thought as we have already seen in the case of Thales and Xenophanes – and perhaps Pythagoras – and as we will have intimated with respect to Plato. Nietzsche, in his ‘rather commonplace’ account of the ‘pre-platonic’ philosophers, accords with the picture of Parmenides the ‘logician’ in light of his doctrine of Being. Heidegger, on the contrary, has offered a different interpretation of Being and of its significance for Parmenides, with his focus upon *Moirai* (Fate) and *Aletheia* (Truth). Burnet, nevertheless, in a way, which prefigures Badiou’s statement regarding the ‘pre-socratics’ in relation to Lacan, emphasizes that Parmenides wrote in a poetic style, in metrical language, which, at its face, allows us to amplify our contention on the attunement of poetic expression with philosophy – and – in light of Nietzsche’s desire to disclose the truth of ‘science’ through the ‘lens of art’ – scientific thought (*Wissenschaft*). Burnet – in the same breath – states that it is only Empedocles who also wrote in verse, and that Xenophanes, who was a poet, was not a philosopher, but merely a joke of Plato. In this way – and indeed without any evidence for his assertion – Burnet contends that the Ionians wrote in a merely prosaic style. Perhaps such a judgement relies upon a rather constricted notion of poetic expression, or of ‘poetics’ as such – or upon ‘testimony’ from ‘authorities’ such as Aristotle. In either case, Heidegger’s intimation of a poetics of Being and Becoming, and of Nietzsche’s contention of the Dionysian *abgrund* of tragic thought cautions us to take a step back from an insidious array of received narratives from previous eras of interpretation. Further incentives to take a

step back entice us, not only in light of Burnet's anachronistic claims that Parmenides was the 'father of materialism', who articulated a logical metaphysics of 'substance', etc., but also, in light of our own genealogical hermeneutics of early 'Greek' thought, in light of the context of emergence.

Even without the obvious seductions of Nietzsche, Heidegger and others, we can throw into question the blunt manner of the projections upon Parmenides and the other participants of early Greek thought. Burnet is setting forth an account, though not as a self-critical hermeneutic, but as a series of suppressions from a 'tyrant', imposing, like Cornford, in his string of essays on Pythagoras, in the 1920s, structures and specificities of thought which have no basis in any extant evidence. (Though his prejudices echo as ghosts). While we could question Burnet's notion that the Ionians were not 'poets' (a 'fact' that Badiou does not even seem to question), we could further ask after something else: why, after all, did Parmenides, the father of logic, materialism, and substance ontology chose to disseminate his novel thought in the manner of poetry? Is he being 'ironic' in the manner of Wittgenstein – as those *resolute* souls would like to interpret the *Tractatus*? If poetry is not the problem – then why did Plato send them on their way (and why is 'philosophy' so boring)? Indeed, it would seem that *poiesis*, as Heidegger and Nietzsche ceaselessly contend, is the radical expressivity of becoming and, for the former, of a Being that is not susceptible to that 'propositional logic' of *mere judgement* amidst the onticity of factual 'states of affairs'.

We are to plunge into the Nameless amidst the event of Being. Burnet does not address this 'question', even in light of the explicit statement of Parmenides (or the Goddess), to cast our gaze toward the 'deceptive' ordering of words' in the mortal domain – to *this* 'poetics of becoming' – which, we should also *know* according to the Goddess. Yet, we cannot accept the 'account' of Burnet and his myriad disciples, as he neither 'accounts' for the poetic expressivity of Parmenides, nor, does he make vibrant 'connectivities', not only to the 'situational' constellation of 'names' and 'ideas', as with his later reference to Heraclitus, or his alleged criticism of Pythagoras, but also to the context of emergence of early thought, for instance, in the question of his philosophical relation to the Ionian thinkers. 'Our way of speaking' (Plotinus) will never express this Being of the All – 'is' it possible to intimate this *thisness* of Being with language, are there different languages? Can a singular 'style', *ethos*, of language 'point out' phenomena that cannot be disclosed with other words and textures of words? Perhaps the irony of Parmenides is tragic – something Burnet, like the rest, in their own-most intoxication, do/does not mention. Perhaps, Parmenides is not the *first logician*, but was expressing instead the tragic wisdom of an eternal

recurrence of the same. Indeed, it seems clear that, besides Anaximander – whose thoughts are still undecided – the Ionian thinkers – not to mention Hesiod in light of the question of the first – articulated the notion that *being must come from being*. Anaximander will never transgress this requirement of a prerequisite Being – *aperion* is not merely ‘nothing’. Let us just say that ‘we’ do not have any agreement on the extant traces of these thinkers, and, that there have been many attempts, whether for *good or evil*, to ‘make sense’ of these ‘thinkers’. Nevertheless, that does mean that we cannot set forth an alternative perspective upon the early Greek thinkers, which inevitably will incite either savage hostile or staid indifference, silence . . .

The ‘key’ to all of this is ‘truth’ – for instance, how do we ‘make sense’ of Parmenides, beyond the parameters set forth by the logical positivists and their prejudicial heirs? If they are ‘wrong’, then, in which context can we fathom Being, as it is expressed by Parmenides? Nietzsche and the ecstatic Dionysian? Heidegger and the Primordial Word? Or, any of the others . . . For, at the end of the day, what we have here in our hands is a poem, which as Edwin Dolin<sup>1</sup> suggests, is cognate amidst the constellations of Homer and Hesiod, and the Ionian thinkers amid this Mediterranean lifeworld of the archaic epoch. In this light, we must turn to the poem itself, so that we can sense not only its continuity with a Mediterranean lifeworld, but also its specific philosophical significance in light of its place (*topos*) amid the context of emergence. Otherwise, we will become lost in ‘errancy’, as it is clear, that not all *errancy* is creative, positive, ‘productive’ . . . some lies ‘kill’. We turn to the poem under question, as translated by Burnet, with the intention to disclose its philosophical, sense, meaning and its mytho-poetic significance amidst the ‘epoch’ of tragic thought.

## The Poem of Parmenides

**John Burnet (1920)<sup>2</sup>**

I

(I) The car that bears me carried me as far as ever my heart desired, when it had brought me and set me on the renowned way of the goddess, which leads the man who knows through all the towns. On that way was I borne along; for on it did the wise steeds carry me, drawing my car, and maidens showed the way. And the axle, glowing in the socket – for it was urged round by the whirling wheels at each end – gave forth a sound as of a pipe, when the daughters of the Sun, hasting to convey me

into the light, threw back their veils from off their faces and left the abode of Night.

There are the gates of the ways of Night and Day, fitted above with a lintel and below with a threshold of stone. They themselves, high in the air, are closed by mighty doors, and Avenging Justice keeps the keys that fit them. Her did the maidens entreat with gentle words and cunningly persuade to unfasten without demur the bolted bars from the gates. Then, when the doors were thrown back, they disclosed a wide opening, when their brazen posts fitted with rivets and nails swung back one after the other. Straight through them, on the broad way, did the maidens guide the horses and the car, and the goddess greeted me kindly, and took my right hand in hers, and spake to me these words:

Welcome, O youth, that comest to my abode on the car that bears thee tended by immortal charioteers! It is no ill chance, but right and justice that has sent thee forth to travel on this way. Far, indeed, does it lie from the beaten track of men! Meet it is that thou shouldst learn all things, as well the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth, as the opinions of mortals in which is no true belief at all. Yet none the less shalt thou learn these things also, – how passing right through all things one should judge the things that seem to be.

But do thou restrain thy thought from this way of inquiry, nor let habit by its much experience force thee to cast upon this way a wandering eye or sounding ear or tongue; but judge by argument the much disputed proof uttered by me. There is only one way left that can be spoken of . . . (R. P. 113)

## The Way of Truth

(2) Look steadfastly with thy mind at things though afar as if they were at hand. Thou canst not cut off what is from holding fast to what is, neither scattering itself abroad in order nor coming together. (R. P. 118 a)

(3) It is all one to me where I begin; for I shall come back again there.

(4, 5) Come now, I will tell thee – and do thou hearken to my saying and carry it away – the only two ways of search that can be thought of. The first, namely, that *It is*, and that it is impossible for it not to be, is the way of belief, for truth is its companion. The other, namely, that *It is not*, and that it must needs not be, – that, I tell thee, is a path that none can learn of at all. For thou canst not know what is not – that is impossible – nor

utter it; for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be. (R. P. 114)

(6) It needs must be that what can be spoken and thought *is*; for it is possible for it to be, and it is not possible for what is nothing to be. This is what I bid thee ponder. I hold thee back from this first way of inquiry, and from this other also, upon which mortals knowing naught wander two-faced; for helplessness guides the wandering thought in their breasts, so that they are borne along stupefied like men deaf and blind. Undiscerning crowds, who hold that it is and is not the same and not the same, and all things travel in opposite directions! (R. P. 115)

(7) For this shall never be proved, that the things that are not are; and do thou restrain thy thought from this way of inquiry. (R. P. 116)

(8) One path only is left for us to speak of, namely, that *It is*. In this path are very many tokens that *what is* is uncreated and indestructible; for it is complete, immovable and without end. Nor was it ever, nor will it be; for now it is, all at once, a continuous [/175] one. For what kind of origin for it wilt thou look for? In what way and from what source could it have drawn its increase? . . . I shall not let thee say nor think that it came from what is not; for it can neither be thought nor uttered that anything is not. And, if it came from nothing, what need could have made it arise later rather than sooner? Therefore must it either be altogether or be not at all. Nor will the force of truth suffer aught to arise besides itself from that which is not. Wherefore, justice doth not loose her fetters and let anything come into being or pass away, but holds it fast. Our judgment thereon depends on this: "*Is it or is it not?*" Surely it is adjudged, as it needs must be, that we are to set aside the one way as unthinkable and nameless (for it is no true way), and that the other path is real and true. How, then, can what *is* be going to be in the future? Or how could it come into being? If it came into being, it is not; nor is it if it is going to be in the future. Thus is becoming extinguished and passing away not to be heard of. (R. P. 117)

Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike, and there is no more of it in one place than in another, to hinder it from holding together, nor less of it, but everything is full of what is. Wherefore it is wholly continuous; for what is, is in contact with what is.

Moreover, it is immovable in the bonds of mighty chains, without beginning and without end; since coming into being and passing away have been driven afar, and true belief has cast them away. It is the same, and it

rests in the self-same place, abiding in itself. And thus it remaineth constant in its place; for hard necessity keeps it in the bonds of the limit that holds it fast on every side. Wherefore it is not permitted to what is to be infinite; for it is in need of nothing; while, if it were infinite, it would stand in need of everything. (R. P. 118)

The thing that can be thought and that for the sake of which the thought exists is the same; for you cannot find thought without something that is, as to which it is uttered. And there is not, and never shall be, anything besides what is, since fate has chained it so as to be whole and immovable. Wherefore all these things are but names which mortals have given, believing them to be true – coming into being and passing away, being and not being, change of place and alteration of bright colour. (R. P. 119)

Since, then, it has a furthest limit, it is complete on every side, like the mass of a rounded sphere, equally poised from the centre in every direction; for it cannot be greater or smaller in one place than in another. For there is no nothing that could keep it from reaching out equally, nor can aught that is be more here and less there than what is, since it is all inviolable. For the point from which it is equal in every direction tends equally to the limits. (R. P. 121)

### The Way of Belief

Here shall I close my trustworthy speech and thought about the truth. Henceforward learn the beliefs of mortals, giving ear to the deceptive ordering of my words.

Mortals have made up their minds to name two forms, one of which they should not name, and that is where they go astray from the truth. They have distinguished them as opposite in form, and have assigned to them marks distinct from one another. To the one they allot the fire of heaven, gentle, very light, in every direction the same as itself, but not the same as the other. The other is just the opposite to it, dark night, a compact and heavy body. Of these I tell thee the whole arrangement as it seems likely; for so no thought of mortals will ever outstrip thee. (R. P. 121)

(9) Now that all things have been named light and night, and the names which belong to the power of each have been assigned to these things and to those, everything is full at once of light and dark night, both equal, since neither has aught to do with the other.

(10, 11) And thou shalt know the substance of the sky, and all the signs in the sky, and the resplendent works of the glowing sun's pure torch, and whence they arose. And thou shalt learn likewise of the wandering deeds of the round-faced moon, and of her substance. Thou shalt know, too, the heavens that surround us, whence they arose, and how Necessity took them and bound them to keep the limits of the stars . . . how the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the sky that is common to all, and the Milky Way, and the outermost Olympos, and the burning might of the stars arose. (R. P. 123, 124)

(12) The narrower bands were filled with unmixed fire, and those next them with night, and in the midst of these rushes their portion of fire. In the midst of these is the divinity that directs the course of all things; for she is the beginner of all painful birth and all begetting, driving the female to the embrace of the male, and the male to that of the female. (R. P. 125)

(13) First of all the gods she contrived Eros. (R. P. 125)

(14) Shining by night with borrowed light, wandering round the earth.

(15) Always looking to the beams of the sun.

(16) For just as thought stands at any time to the mixture of its erring organs, so does it come to men; for that which thinks is the same, namely, the substance of the limbs, in each and every man; for their thought is that of which there is more in them. (R. P. 128)

(17) On the right boys; on the left girls.

(19) Thus, according to men's opinions, did things come into being, and thus they are now. In time they will grow up and pass away. To each of these things men have assigned a fixed name. (R. P. 129 b)

## Elements of Interpretation

Is Burnet concerned with poetry, *poiesis*, and its significance? He certainly does not care about poetic arrangement, or *poiesis* as such . . . that is precise, above all else . . . Kirk and others merely vivisect the poem into the trays, the *hegemonic* categories, of their own anachronism.

Before we begin a 'reading' of the poem, of which there have been radically disparate interpretations (from the 'Logical Positivists' to Heidegger), it would be well to begin with an issue that would seem so obvious as not to be noticed. Indeed, this is the status of the text of Parmenides as a 'poem',

a work of *poiesis* which, as Dolin and others have shown, is oriented to the mytho-poetic horizons of the archaic age. In this manner, it would greatly facilitate our current study of the context of emergence for early Greek thought if we reflect upon the *topos* of significance for the *philo-poiesis* of Parmenides, as we can see, in an allusion to Heraclitus ('Undiscerning crowds, who hold that it is and is not the same and not the same, and all things travel in opposite directions!') For – the poetic 'status' of this work, not to mention its explicit genealogy – as for instance, the Odyssean morphology of the journey of the hero, one that we have already considered in the heroic strand of Mesopotamian *mythos* – raises questions as to the temporal, existential status of the meta-narrative textures of the poem itself. The Goddess speaks to a mortal – she tells him the Truth in precise statements which indicate her own gaze as an immortal Goddess, one that beholds Being, though not amid the transcendental horizon of temporality, from the perspective of existence (*Dasein*). She discloses this Truth to mortal ears, to one who not only has no 'choice' but to express himself in the *poiesis* of becoming – if only in the style of paradox, as the poetry of the impossible. Nevertheless, the entire texture of the poem is one of narrative, of temporal events, and expression, and, despite the words of the Goddess which tell the mortal that his fellows, these finite creatures have merely a private awareness, Parmenides, as a mortal (though as one who 'knows'), cannot 'escape' these 'limits' of our 'deceptive ordering of words'. Not only does such a 'stipulation' remind us of Plotinus, as we have seen, but also underlines the invocation of the Goddess for the 'traveller' to also be awake to the knowing of mortals. This invocation – though the Goddess nearly seems to hold the beliefs of mortals in contempt – is not merely one which, in the manner of the positivists, would encourage us to police the statements of 'philosophy' in the manner of elimination, of the merely *via negativa*, critical apparatus of nullification of 'nonsense'. This is only one way to interpret her denunciations of the mortal 'way of belief', one that still allows the prejudices of *other times*, of Plato and Aristotle, to *bleed* into that which has been. For, we could argue, as Wittgenstein had commented upon his own *Tractatus*, that the significance of the *Didactic* poem is 'two-fold' – that which it *says*, but more importantly, that which it *shows*. Heidegger is in accord with Wittgenstein, as he offers him a tribute in his Seminar on Heraclitus:

Wittgenstein says the following. The difficulty in which thinking stands compares with a man in a room, from which he wants to get out. At first, he attempts to get out through the window, but it is too high for him.



Then he attempts to get out through the chimney, which is too narrow for him. If he simply turned around, he would see that the door was open all along.

We ourselves are permanently set in motion and caught in the hermeneutical circle.<sup>3</sup>

Parmenides, himself, is caught amid this 'circle' – though the 'door is open', indeed, there is this 'revelation' of the Goddess who teases us with an *escape*. Yet, there is 'no exit', not only is Being set in strict limits by Dike, and others Goddesses and Gods, but, mortal existence is obviously also set within inexorable limits – one's from which, in our darkest hours, we seek escape in our otherworldly hopes. But – as finite – we do not 'turn around' – or, if we do, then we realize, just as easily, that the tragic Fate of our mortal existence only becomes that much more clear to us amidst this moment. It is just as the mortal perspective of Oedipus – he seeks to evade, to flee the eccentricities of *Moirai*, but only, hastens the Truth with his flight. There remains the meta-narrative of the temporal being, who 'validates', with his finitude, sacrifice, this Truth, the alleged, instantaneous gaze of the Divinity.

As we have ascertained from our analysis of the context of emergence, the Goddess is not saying anything novel. She only reminds us of her perspective. For, contrary to the solid assertions upon Parmenides and his significance as the first logician, etc., it is clear that those who can be understood in light of the context of emergence, have already always agreed upon this simple notion – *ex nihilo nihil fit* – a notion that is sacrosanct, not only in Homer, Hesiod, but also, back to the narrators of Gilgamesh. Is Parmenides, looking at this 'strange' question in a different way, not in fact a 'conservative', after all – and not one who is seeking a 'breach', but one, who is seeking to preserve a 'time honoured truth', one that is re-affirmed in Tragedy. Perhaps, Heraclitus was going too far with his intimate hermeneutics of existence, of a *logos*, which, not a being, is that *aperion* which expresses the Truth of existence. A poetics as Being – expressions of becoming, of flux, this river, of a bow and the lyre – a 'unity of opposites' – is this that which Parmenides stood in fear or anxiety, but, ironically, as a cautionary, sustained voice against interpretations which would violate the taboo of the Nothing? No one has made such a suggestion, outside of Anaximander with his intimate of the Unlimited – though such a limitlessness is still cognate with the question of the first, but is also seeking to express, as we have seen, a deeper sense of Being – beyond this private awareness and language of a singular mortal, toward the ironic trajectory of the All. The 'Hexameter

Poem' – in which he is 'taken' in a chariot to a Goddess who discloses to him the Two Ways of Truth, is a self-interpretation of existence, set forth by Parmenides. Yet, as we root through these fragments, we must keep in 'mind' the tragic context of this expression, as exemplified in Schürmann's silent writing on Parmenides, in his article 'Tragic Differing: The Law of the One and the Law of Contraries in Parmenides',<sup>4</sup> in which he reminds us of our mortal *topos*, this event of our brutal awakening amidst a 'monstrous site', and the phantasmic horizons of our *place* of self-interpretation.

We are told – we mortals – that it is, and that which is not, is not, as it can only be said in the negative. It is our deceptive mortality, which is that of errancy . . . The 'Way that is Not' is no way at all . . . Mortal knowing – contrary, but not contradictory to 'It is' – a problem that is indicated through its temporal language and finite being. Parmenides intimates,

Yet none the less shalt thou learn these things also, – how passing right through all things one should judge the things that seem to be . . . learn the beliefs of mortals, giving ear to the deceptive ordering of my words.

Being and thought are the 'same', as any expression insinuates Being. Yet, 'contraries' subsist in Being, but tragically differ – mortals will never rest in the 'plenum' of Being, and thus, they perish. Parmenides seeks to remind us that our utter mortality exceeds in its own Kosmic and sacred significance, as with the tragedians of his day. He is speaking to those – like Cratylus – and Zeno – who began to 'play in mere concepts', amid an 'unworlded' space of the *matheme*, or, at least, the *mathesis* that is projected as an anachronistic 'work of art'. Parmenides throws into relief, with his doctrine of Being (written under the influence of his teacher Xenophanes) – and according to the anachronistic mainstays – radical challenges to philosophical 'accounts' of change, as in the case of both Ionian and Pythagorean 'accounts' of becoming. Regardless, if we accept this narrative, we must be aware that the next episode of our tragic-comic drama consists in the task of subsequent philosophers, to not only acknowledge 'Being', but also, to save the 'pluralism' of becoming. It is probable that this narrative is utterly questionable that the opponents of myth and of tragic thought are merely 'bad poets' – like the bureaucrat that is Plato. Indeed, that the hegemonic, traditional meta-narrative must be placed under question – as with any temporal expression. The question is not that of Being – but of an account of change that allows us to disclose Being, or, at least, that aspect that *shows* itself. It is 'clear' that there was never any question as regards *ex nihilo nihil fit*. The only question is that of the 'how', of that *ethos* and *bios* of

the dissemination of mortal existence amid its own context of emergence. It is, in this way, that we turn to Empedocles and Anaxagoras, with an exploration of their *topos* of thinking which may or may not be 'read', in light of Parmenides and his alleged doctrine of Being. Of course, they may be read this way – in the way of the hegemonic 'phantasm' of *that* tradition – yet, they may be read *better* if we pay no heed to these questions of 'logic'. Burnet, as with his parrots, was never interested in the poetry, *poiesis*, of Parmenides – however, with his interpretation, he erased that *topos* – the only *place* to apprehend this thought.

It is the indigent perspective of mortal knowing, that of belief, that intimates the tragic aspect of the Hexameter poem. The *poiesis* of becoming, this self-interpretation of a mortal being, allows us to begin to depart from the Canonical phantasm and the docile constructions of the epoch – to thirst, seek and to find a differing sense of the indication of 'turning around' toward the open door – and walking outside into and across the metontological *topos* of tragic existence.

## Chapter 11

# Love, Strife and Mind – Empedocles and Anaxagoras

As we suggested in the previous chapter, it is not necessary to primarily regard Parmenides as the ‘father of logic’. Indeed, if we follow the indications set forth by Heidegger, in his lecture course ‘The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic,’ we could instead apprehend that ‘logic’ and its progeny, ‘logistic’, is a late, and perhaps degenerate, unworlded expression. Nevertheless, it would be a vast misunderstanding of Heidegger (one that is the norm), and his metontology of retrieval (*Wiederholung*) if we concluded that he wished to eliminate, to destroy, logic and logical analysis. In fact, that which Heidegger seeks, for instance, in his ‘phenomenological deconstructing’ of Leibniz, is the originary *topos* for his thought, of that *logos* (a deeper sense of philosophical ‘logic’) in which the latter is assailed by the ‘truth of Being’, and before – he covered over this abyss with his truths of reason and of his valorization of the statement, of judgement over the Being that is forgotten amid the proliferation of entities, of appetitive perceptions, organized and reproduced by the discipline of Reason. Far from an annihilation of ‘logic’ and ‘analysis,’ Heidegger seeks instead a re-contextualization of *logos* as an intimate expressive language of hermeneutical interpretation, within the hermeneutical circle (and its open door) of a differing sense of analysis. It is in a similar spirit that we have approached the anachronistic renditions of Parmenides as the first logician. We have sought to set forth the thought of Parmenides as inherently tragic, a reminder – as with the Ionian thinkers – of our utter finitude as mortals. In this sense, we can trace an enduring ‘continuity’ traversing the mists of primeval thought with its intrinsically elegant mytho-poetic horizons – not only with respect to *ex nihilo nihil fit*, but also in reference to the radical character of mortality. Parmenides reiterates the radical limits of existence, and the ultimate double bind of tragic existence, unknowing. Perhaps, it is in such an intimation of existential limits that we can begin to trace the emergence of the

un-worlded citadel of 'logic', and its desire to gaze upon eternity. In this light, logic, as with mathematics, could be seen as intimations of mortality, but in its desire for eternity, far away from the taint of temporality – as with Plato's flight of the dove amid the pure forms. Yet, the *modernistic* logicians and mathematicians have radically misunderstood Parmenides – in fact, he has only been admitted into their language game, and its rules of use, as long as the latter promises not become an 'outlaw', a 'rule-breaker' – this is the enactment of anachronism. Parmenides seeks eternity, as well, though not as a set of 'logical criteria of analysis', but as the *Is* – that Being *is*, simply, always. Indeed, once this insight has been revealed to us – by a goddess – as an ironic tragic desire . . . once . . . there is nothing more to be said, our attributes, our negative paintings, merely underline our own desire for Being – and for a Being that is eternal (although we have already *said* too much). Perhaps, as we have alluded, Parmenides felt that this insight may be lost in the Heraclitean flux, especially as it seems to rely on the mortal desire for truth, that is, the desire to search inside oneself – Parmenides requires a Goddess, though Heraclitus points (and does not point) to Zeus as the lightning bolt which steers all things. There seems to be a critical question here, and one that goes far beyond the mere philology of logic as a later form of types, rules, set-theory, conceptual frameworks, etc. Though the question will show logic to not only be a symptom of, but also as a departure from, originary thought. The question is not simple to express, but concerns the 'power' and 'way' of 'regulation' of the phenomena, in light of the originary difference of existence. Heraclitus beckons a sign – intimate regulation – as the thunderbolt, of an immanent *logos* texturing the phenomena. Parmenides, following in an oblique manner Anaximander's *ontological difference* of the *Aperion*, seeks to reiterate the distinction between the *That* and the *How* – and from the vantage of the Goddess, mortal 'life' and 'knowing' may not even have Being – any access to Reality – as it were. A 'stranger' may weigh into our conversation suggesting Parmenides rejects Heraclitus' basic premise, his *epistemic* thesis – that knowledge is possible through the *logos*, one that emerges through a search into oneself. Perhaps, Parmenides was aware of the 'unintended' sceptical conclusions which emerged in the proclamation of Cratylus that one cannot step into the same river once – not to mention the 'idiosyncrasies' of Zeno and his followers. Perhaps – philosophy itself lost itself amid the proliferation of entities, of beings – logical, mathematical beings, 'problems' to the exclusion, forgetfulness of the 'question of Being'. Is this a Heideggerian anachronism, of the question of Being with respect to his meditations upon *Aletheia* and *Moirai*, in his work on *Parmenides*? Perhaps, on the

contrary – and, in light of his subversive repetition of the ‘motif of the dawn’ – we could propose that Heidegger ‘got this right’, not only the question of Being – but, also the intimation of *Aletheia* as the play of concealment and unconcealment. Such an indication suggests that Being is self-regulating, that it does not need us, in this way, although it may have other needs with regards to us (cf. ‘The Turning’). We could, just as immediately, reject this proposal (many will simply due to the reference to Heidegger), though, we can try to extricate ourselves from anachronism if we remember the tragic context for the emergence of the so-called – and anachronistically named – ‘Didactic’ poem of Parmenides. Parmenides is taken by a goddess who, in her domain, reveals the Truth to him, that Being ‘is’ – moreover, she tells him to also learn the ways of ‘mortal knowing’, though she cautions him to pay heed to the ‘deceptive ordering of words’. Such a protocol may seem a perfect ‘sign’ of positivistic logical analysis, or even Wittgenstein’s dialogues with the Sphinx of bewitchment in his later writings. Yet, within the horizons of early Greek, tragic, thought, we do not have the power to merely enact – upon the *hypokeimenon* of ‘subjectivity’ – either an ‘ideal speech situation’, or, an ‘ideal language’. We are certainly *delusional* to ‘think’ that we have this power ‘now’ – though, we can try – ‘try now, we can only lose, and our love become a funeral pyre’.

The *poiesis* of Parmenides is expressed amidst the horizons of finitude – and, with its aspiration for an eternal, tragic affirmation, it seeks, with Pythagoras, a remembrance of this, Being, the All – there is ‘no’, ‘nor there need be’ an, ‘exit’ – ‘entangled within language’ – but these words merely express the negative of one who already seeks an escape from the tragedy of an ultimate double bind . . . It may be ‘best’, in such a situation, to remain silent . . . though, it is said, that the quiet contemplation of the stars led a thinker to fall into a well, or, another, to step out of a window in Paris.

### Empedocles of Agrigentum (490–430 BC): A Voice from Sicily

Empedocles plunged into *this* volcano of Aetna – declaring that he was ‘god’ . . . a tragic ‘end’ . . . though, if at least he is a god, he can be reborn . . . Jesus would not have suffered much if he *were* a God; yet, if he were merely a man, he would have suffered unimaginably for his tragic ‘will to truth’. The divine, sacred – disruption (*Übergang*, in Schlegel) erupts as a break, as a novel conversant in an emerging philosophical network, one who not

only developed his thought from out of the context of emergence, but has had intimate contacts with these others in this network – amidst the constellation of a lifeworld.

Empedocles – as the usual narrative discloses, admitted plurality, and sought to give an account of existence which would be immune to the challenge of Parmenides. He exalts, in this light, the five senses and the body. He ‘designates’ Four Elements – Air, Earth, Fire and Water, which are uncreated, as is the case with the Being of Parmenides – and, held that all things come from a mixture of these. In this interpretation, Empedocles seeks to ‘save the phenomena’ and the ‘world’ of the body. The ‘powers’ of Love and Strife serve to provide an *modus operandi* for ‘change’ which consists in the transmutation of an uncreated plurality of being – and a manner in which mortal thought may have a grounding in a doctrine of Being. Love and Strife contend for an impossible supremacy, as they circle each other in a vortex, from which arises existence, erupting and disrupting in a eternal cycle of recurrence – as the fluxuation of ‘joining together’ and ‘separating off’ that occurs through the contestation of Love and Strife. In the way of tragic thought, Love is that which brings all things together, into a Dionysian ‘communion’ (and which destroys individuals amid the leaf-like change of mortal existence), while Strife is that which drives ‘things’ apart – destroys ‘communion’ – in the dream image, the *topos* of Apollonian ‘individuation’. For Empedocles, according to the extant evidence, also regarded the cyclical recurrence of Love and Strife, not only operative amidst the intimate life of the self, the ‘microcosm’, but also in the life of the All, of the Great Year, as the *Kosmos* enacts the ‘appearance’ of destruction and creation, although its Being is essentially the same throughout the transformations. We could perhaps note the resemblance between our own *Mythos* of the ‘Big Bang’, with *one* movement of Empedoclean philosophy. In this light, the philosophy of Empedocles can be seen as a grand synthesis of Anaximander, Pythagoras and Heraclitus – and as a continuation of the poetic tradition of Orpheus.

At the same time, however, we must ask the question of the status of the philosophy of Empedocles, as a response to a challenge by Parmenides – just as the latter philosophy is said to have constituted a radical criticism of the contradictory character of Pythagoreanism? As Deleuze would ask – as a *ghost* – ‘Which Parmenides?’ Parmenides the ‘logician’ – or the one who is *attuned* amidst the ‘context of emergence’? This ‘usual story’ – which may not be problematic on some levels, tells that Empedocles, ‘reacting’ to the ‘logic’ of Parmenides, set forth a sensuous *topos*, of Love and Strife, with the intent of ‘saving the phenomenon’. Such an interpretation reinforces

the contention that Parmenides was the 'first logician', and whose significance lies in his argumentation against the previous historicity of thought. Yet, even if Parmenides is not the first thinker of Being, a more plausible interpretation would delineate Parmenides, not only as a participant within the archaic context of emergence, but also, one who sought to make an explicitly ontological clarification between *en* and *panta*, to intimate the conversations of Heidegger in his *Heraclitus Seminar*. For, as Heidegger himself states in his *Parmenides*, it is possible to interpret the notion of Being in its relation to beings in a way that is not simply a retroactive, and anachronistic picture which merely repeats the distinction between *essentia* and *existentia* in Scholastic and Modern philosophy. Heidegger discloses the context for an interpretation of the poem of Parmenides in light of, as we have suggested, of *Aletheia* and *Moirai*, clearly laying out the tragic context of the utterance. In this light, that which remains in withdrawal, is that aspect of Being as concealment – that which shows itself amid the *topos* of beings, that place of mortal thought, is Being as unconcealment. It is a play of Being, as the tragic *topos* of concealment amidst unconcealment, which indicates the *ethos* of tragic differing, of the law of the One and of contraries, which is intimated by Schürmann – and which calls into question the reductionist interpretation of Parmenides as a mere logician. Of course, the latter interpretation always remains a possibility, but only at the risk that such a line of thought will miss that which is essential for an understanding of early Greek thought – and specifically, in this case, of an understanding of the relationship between the thinking of Parmenides and Empedocles. For, it could be argued that Parmenides is not concerned with the *logic* of narrative in the sense of the principle of contradiction, but in the deeper sense of a *logos* which is attuned to the question of Being. Perhaps – and this question will be to turn our perspective around – Parmenides, contrary to being a 'logician' is himself reacting to that potential in Heraclitus in which there is a *logos* that is self-sufficient and which is not attuned to Being, of the radical danger of a 'free-floating logic' which not only steers Being, but also, speaks in such a manner – as Christianity will eventually do – that would suggest that Being is not – that something may arise from nothing, as from a Word. Far from denying the cogency of mortal thought, and of its pursuit, Parmenides is reminding us of the dire fate in our way of speaking of a 'deceptive ordering of words', of a false expression that is mired in *Pseudos* – in deception, in its forgetfulness and obfuscation of a sense of Being. It would be possible, from this perspective, that Parmenides is perhaps – and with a great deal of irony – denouncing the very linguistic and mathematical catastrophes of Cratylus and Zeno, who infected our thought with either



scepticism regarding Being and *Logos* itself, or, destroyed the tragic possibility of mortal *ethos* of knowing with a logistical *matheme* of radical 'negation'. It is indeed possible that Parmenides had other targets for his reminder, such as the *Genesis* narrative which may posit a beginning from Nothing – or of other mytho-poetical horizons which have not 'paid heed' to the question of Being – as we have suggested, is the mainstay for the mytho-poetic influences within the context of emergence, and throughout the historicity of tragic thought.

It would be possible, in light of the foregoing discussion of a different way of seeing the thought of Parmenides to set forth a differing sense of the intentions of Empedocles with his tragic thought of Strife and Love. On the one hand, as we have sought to show, it is clear that there is 'continuity' with respect to the doctrine of Being in the early Greek tradition. On the other hand, there have been differing strategies, ways of expressing *that which is the case*, as would be expected in the mortal dimension of tragic Love and Strife. We have no need of the postulation of another 'break', but must recognize the sophistication of the conversation of the early Greek thinkers, who participated, for over a century, in a 'project' that sought, as we may say, the Truth of each and All. Empedocles – perhaps, the arbiter in a plausible 'dispute' between Heraclitus and Parmenides, sought a 'resolution' with his ingenious suggestion of the 'unity of opposites' of Love and Strife, but which orchestrated the emergence of beings amid its intimate life amidst the eternal elements. The lesson learned from Parmenides was not one of 'logic', but – of the danger of 'logic' – of an unworlded *logos* which would begin to make us question the truth of Being as that which is revealed by that which is never revealed – except perhaps, if a Goddess summons us.

Strife – and Love – a 'unity of opposites' – one that is *explicitly* sensuous . . . an attempt to 'size-up', to see, taste, smell and touch this other . . . The sensuous world, in each of its myriad aspects is a dance between 'communion' and the wildness of *ipseity*, between Love and Strife – each being as a being is possessed of love, unity – yet, each, as it is singular – differing from each of the others – is also possessed of Strife. The opposing forces are never 'pure', at least for long – the event of singularity – for the most part, these are embedded amidst the beings, composed as these are from eternal elements. Such a scenario would serve to strengthen the contention of the Goddess that mortal knowing is also essential, and such a possibility is said as much by Parmenides in the notion that narratives of transformation also abide a reference to Being. In this way, the thought of Empedocles need not be seen as a rear-guard attempt to 'save the phenomena', and, as it maintains the 'unity

of opposites', cannot be seen to 'verify' an interpretation which suggests that Parmenides is the *first logician*. The question is not that of logic, but of the relationship of *logos* and Being. Nevertheless, there remains the 'possibility' that Empedocles is truly responding to one who has fled into Being – though, *that*, even if we could construct a *likely story*, would not depart from our overriding contention that the issue that most concerns us is that of Being – and not 'logic'. For instance, we could even contend that Empedocles is defending Heraclitus by *showing* a 'system of propositions', in which the possibility of change persists intimately with the remembrance of Being – indeed, Heraclitus already suggests as much, though Empedocles, in such a scenario, would sensualize the *logos* through the expressions of Love and Strife, intimate expressions of mortal life. Perhaps, this is indeed the case – or, again, Empedocles sought to strengthen the ontological possibility of mortal knowing. That which is significant however in this discussion are the implications of the presentation of any interpretation – not only that there are always a variety of readings of a phenomenon, a text, work of art, but that specific interpretations, as is the way, exclude not only other readings, but, in some cases, entire dimensions of philosophical possibility, as we have already seen in the merely 'logical' reading of Parmenides. In this light, we will turn to Anaxagoras in order to not only continue our narrative, but also, to assess the terrain of the question, indeed, of the significance of the thought of Empedocles with novel eyes.

### Anaxagoras of Colophon (500–428 BC)

With Anaxagoras, we return to Ionia – though he travelled to Athens with his book on *Phusis*, which he put on sale in the Agora. Of course, there are many more names and stories that we wish to mention as we know so little – as we know little of the mode of dissemination of these works of philosophical thought. Yet, we must be aware of our limits, as from amid these, we will 'know ourselves', the significance of our thought – the limitations of our current study concerns laying the ground for an alternative, deeper interpretation of early 'Greek' – or, tragic – thought. We admit to our desire to fathom the significance of tragic thought – *as if* – it exhibited the character of an integral meta-narrative, meaningful amidst the mytho-poetic and material-cultural horizons of the archaic world. We have already given *good grounds* for such an interpretation, and this is why the current study is, neither an anachronistic erasure of mere ideological prejudice, nor a dissociated 'survey' of extant traces of thinkers, who are no longer allowed

to think and engage these others, amidst the appropriate context, in thoughtful words, in conversation amidst a world readily understood by each and all of the participants. According to the surveys, which are always philological in orientation, Anaxagoras is to be seen as a 'radical pluralist', but, who still remained *obedient* to the 'logic' of Parmenides's doctrine of Being. Such a narrative insinuates Anaxagoras within the trajectory, as we recall, of Empedocles as a respondent to Parmenides. Should we interpret Anaxagoras, on the other hand, as a defender of the *gist* of Parmenides, just as we forgave the chance that Empedocles could be seen as a defender of Heraclitus? Is it necessary to interject the 'dialectics' of Hegel into our conversation? Surely not, though, this – despite Heidegger's reservations, is another way to look at the 'progression' and 'development' of early 'Greek' thought. Indeed, we must begin to interpret archaic thought as a *topos* for – indicative of – an originary desire for Truth. We should defer to them . . . and beyond, before them . . . We know nothing. All mortal thought is embedded in language, in mytho-poetic expression, words that 'make sense' in light of the horizons of significance of *poiesis*, that is attuned with 'that which is the case'. The 'trick', in this way, is to tell the 'best story'. This raises again the *methodos* of dissemination of thought – for it is clear that amidst the early Greek Agon, artists performed their works amidst festive competitions, conversations – as Pythagoras alluded, the philosopher does not seek 'glory', or, 'fame', but to understand that which is. Yet, that does not preclude performance.

Nevertheless, it is said that Anaxagoras wrote a book, and took it to Athens, where he places it on sale in the Agora. In this book, according to the usual accounts, Anaxagoras said that all things were One, and in everything there is a portion of everything. What this implies is that each thing that exists must have existed always, if, that is, we endorse the Parmenidean doctrine of Being. In this light, each thing exists as a 'seed' in everything else, and the Being of any one thing results from a separating out of that which is always already there. Through this seemingly *physicalistic* interpretation of Parmenides, Becoming is reconciled with Being. As with Xenophanes – who Burnet asserts is a mere poet – the chaos of beings – down to their 'concrete' level, is coordinated by Mind (*Nous*), a 'species', with Anaximenes and Pythagoras, of Air, a separate, self-ruling power which, at the 'beginning of the day', initiated the rotation (recall the vortex of Empedocles) and orders all things (without itself being effected). In this account, Mind replaces Love and Strife, yet, maintains the unity of opposites, but as a *dualism* of which there can be no bridge – except perhaps for that part of existence which is 'endowed' with Mind. While the play of Love and Strife

may have given a much stronger answer to the alleged challenge of Parmenides – at least in so far as the doctrine allows us to account for the general existence of the ‘plurality of elements’ and *things* ‘in general’, the question must again be asked as to the specificity of things in terms of their design, for instance, a leaf upon a tree. What is it that makes a leaf, a leaf – in terms of its specific being and texture, as a leaf, and as this leaf? Does Empedocles provide us with an ‘answer’ to this ‘question’? Anaxagoras held that Empedocles did not provide, either the answers to these questions, nor the resources for working towards ‘answers’. This would be the basic ‘rationale’ for why he set forth his rather obscure doctrine that everything – meaning that all objects, as they exist, for instance hair, are already in existence from the beginning, and are part of a ‘grand mixture of all things’. Such a sentiment suggests *that* impossible, though, with perfectly good ‘reasons’ – that, in the *pie that I ate for lunch*, there is a part of hair – not to allude to all the other things amid this world. It is, in this way, that Anaxagoras may seek to answer the question of this specificity of ‘things’. But, we must ask, why must there be such an ‘account’ – can we instead regard Anaxagoras as a philosophical ‘comedian’, one who sought to drive the utter absurdities of Parmenides – and his ill-fated followers – including Empedocles – to their ridiculous conclusions? Could such a comic specificity emerge through Chance and Fate, as we will see in Democritus? We must also ask if Anaxagoras – if we are to take him seriously – is merely begging the question of Being, and, if indeed, he has offered us any solution at all? The question is more complex than this, however, as there is not merely a question of specificity of this *morphe* of ‘beings’, within the tragic horizons of the context of emergence, but also, perhaps, of an attack of ‘Wit’ – as with Schlegel, against the sensuousness of Empedocles. Comedy tears down, dismantles the utter pretension of ‘systems’ and *rationales*. Aristotle makes fun of Anaxagoras – as does Socrates – but could it be possible that Anaxagoras is a philosophical comedian, with a purpose, one to show the absurdity of any attempt to violate that ‘ontological difference’? Does Anaxagoras attack Empedocles here – and take sides with Parmenides? Or, does he instead seek to clarify problems in Empedocles so as to continue to resist Parmenides? Or, is it both? – Or, neither? It is surely possible that his strange specificities of the notion that ‘everything is in everything’ is, in our language, a *reductio ad absurdum*, a destruction via comedic Wit. And, that such a strategy laid the ‘ground’ for the notion of *Nous*, as that lightning, which is, with Xenophanes, that which steers all things with its mere thought. Though, the ‘separation’ of *Nous* from that comedic ontological narrative of the specificity of ‘things’ would remove *Nous* as a *reason* for the specificity,

‘design’ of things – it would only remain as that ‘mover’, which initiates, in ‘our way of speaking’, the separating out which gives rise to all things. But, does such a narrative *make sense*, at the end of the day? We do not know the *reasons* for Anaxagoras – we suspend our disbelief, as we comprehend that Christendom did its best against Heathen thought – most crucially, against tragic thought. Anaxagoras is saying ‘nothing new’ – or, at least, nothing we cannot understand in light of the context of emergence. We could even understand his humor – yet, is it humor, or, should we read him literally, metaphorically? These questions ‘explode’ in our faces as we anticipate the sarcastic ‘criticisms’ of Anaxagoras by Socrates. In this light, and amidst the tragic-comedic horizons of existence, we could perhaps ascertain his assertion of *Nous* as an attempt to distinguish the *logos* – the lightning bolt – from the *materia* of beings – a notion of the First, but one that is only seems *crude*, in relation to Heraclitus, Parmenides – and his immediate interlocutor, Empedocles. The question is that of the relation of Being and *Logos*, of the many and one and of the power, texture and morphology of change. We must enter into the question.

## Chapter 12

### The Divine Beauty of Chaos – Democritus of Thrace (460–370 BC)

Democritus, a student of Leucippus (Abdera, early fifth century), is said to have ‘developed’ the latter’s ‘atomic thesis’, together with the assertion of the vacuum or Void. Of course, it is, as with the rest of the early Greek thinkers, a difficult task to seek to understand the meaning of these words, of their significance, in light of the preponderance of the interpretations of the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions, not to mention the modern scientific readings which seek to inscribe Democritus as a forerunner to contemporary atomic theory.<sup>1</sup> Democritus, as it is with Empedocles and Anaxagoras, is *sited*, by the traditional narrative, as another respondent to the Parmenidean doctrine of Being, and of its development by Zeno, as a thesis that denies change due to the impossibility of a Void. The narrative, moreover, contends that Democritus is, like his predecessors, a ‘radical pluralist’, who developed a philosophy which preserved the doctrine of Being, but, at the same time, maintained plurality, motion and change. We could, of course, immediately, raise many questions and differing possible interpretations in light of our preceding meditations. Yet, we should hear more of the story – for we do not seek merely to destroy another interpretative framework, but to disclose its significance, and, specifically, in light of the *context of emergence*. For, much more light will be shown upon Democritus in light of the topological context of the Asiatic–Mediterranean lifeworld, than by considerations that revolve about either definitions of ‘natural philosophy’, and perhaps questionable debates with the Eleatic philosophers, or of our own scientific preoccupations. Nevertheless, the tale continues that, in contrast to Empedocles and Anaxagoras, with their ‘principles’ of ‘Love and Strife’, and Mind, respectively, Democritus posited two principles, uncreated atoms and Void. The atoms, as it were, underwrote plurality, but being uncreated, and incapable of any type of change (divisibility, destruction) maintained the ‘doctrine of Being’. Void, on the other hand, allowed for motion,

change and again plurality, and was chosen perhaps as an ironic reversal of the prohibition of the Void by one of Parmenides's followers, Melissus. In distinction from the *Nous* of Anaxagoras, for Democritus, there was no teleology, purpose or Mind controlling the becoming of the *Kosmos*, but only Chance, and the infinite possibility of Eternity. In this way, the morphology of existence, of the vast and myriad configurations of all phenomena of the *Kosmos* emerge by chance, coalescing and dissolving amidst an eternal cycle without any *mortal* direction or purpose. We could intimate several aspects of this narrative, the most prominent being the alleged dispute with Parmenides. It is said that Leucippus and Democritus 'simply' dismissed the Eleatic arguments as absurd, merely indicating the obvious change and motion of the *Kosmos*. Yet, despite the gesture toward Parmenides, in the manner of the eternal and indestructible 'Atom', there is yet a clear transgression of the teaching of the Goddess and her prohibition, taboo, of the Nothing – although it remains unclear, in light of our previous – and divergent – meditations, if Democritus is at odds with Parmenides, himself. Another aspect is the apparent unconcern of Democritus with the 'objection' that was made against Empedocles by Anaxagoras – that there must be a *Nous*, a severed controller, for there to be a morphology of existence that exhibits the specificity of 'design'. As we will see, this seminal strand of the narrative leads directly from Empedocles, through Anaxagoras, to Socrates and Plato in light of the question of the meaning and delineations of Mind. For Democritus, as with Nietzsche with his *Amor Fati*, however, it is Chance that is the divine power of the precise morphology and configuration of beings in the world – there would be no need for beings to have already been, as with Anaxagoras, but, with Empedocles, there need be *merely* the 'eternal elements' – or, in this case, the 'atoms' – which are the 'constituents' of existence. We should remember, in light of our guiding indication of a context of emergence, that Chance is a goddess and in the context of archaic mytho-poetic thought, has the creative significance of intelligence. In this light, one may argue that it is Chance which is the source of the precise configuration of beings amid a situation in which atoms move about in the Void (or perhaps the chasm of Chaos). In this way, Democritus seems to 'buck the trend', and provide a counter-example to a narrative which merely 'gossips' about the ridicule to which Anaxagoras is subjected by his younger contemporary Socrates. To a great extent, it is a question of timing – as, according to the 'traditional dating' – Socrates and Democritus were contemporaries, the former 41 and the latter 32 years, when Anaxagoras died. Empedocles died two years earlier, and Parmenides may still have been alive – and Pindar passed in 443 – when Socrates was 29, Democritus was 23.

Such considerations of ‘datability’, temporality, expressed through ‘number’ – intimate the contours and gestures of existence – horizons, concrete life, world – *Kosmos*.

Such ‘parameters’ bring us back to tragic thought and its dwelling in the mytho-poetic horizons of the archaic lifeworld. We are neither concerned with a mere time-line – nor, with ‘histrionics’ ordered by time-lines, amidst a ‘projection’ of linear history, but with temporality, time, datability . . . significance . . . world. For, the question can be raised – what is the meaning of Democritus apparent rejection of the alleged Eleatic rejection of the Void? In other words, if Democritus – as it is said of Empedocles and Anaxagoras – is so concerned with the logic of Parmenides (assuming for the moment that this is his significance), then why would he affirm one aspect of Eleatic thought, that it is ‘contradictory’ to speak of the Nothing (and hence, the doctrine of the Atom), and at once – in the same breath, as it were – violate that ‘logic’ with his doctrine of the Void? To commit a contradiction in the attempt to avoid a contradiction? We must admit that such a scenario *does not make sense*, and we must thus seek a more plausible strategy of interpretation. The same problem re-emerges if we merely – as we have discussed previously – transfer the significance of Parmenides to that of an ‘ontologist’. In this case – as the maxim invokes – true Being does not contain a vacuum. Once again – Democritus ‘speaks against’ himself, with one hand giving Parmenides his due, and, with the other hand, taking it away . . . such a scenario is not convincing. Yet, if we return to our original questioning which suggested an interpretation of Parmenides, in light of Schürmann’s essay, ‘Tragic Differing: The Law of the One and Contraries in Parmenides’, it would be possible to comprehend the tragic significance of the radical gesture of Parmenides – that, perhaps, he seeks to remind us of the ‘thatness’ of Being, the ‘eternity’ of Being, even as we, as mortals, are immersed in the play of *Aletheia*, with its *unconcealment*, *concealment* and *Pseudos*, deception. Parmenides – as the Goddess invokes – and despite the corrupted state of the fragments – wishes us to seek to know the Way of Mortal Knowing – but that we should never forget either the question of Being or of the mortal dwelling of existence, which is Being in its truth, although only as the ‘tip of the iceberg’. Parmenides writes, for instance,

And thou shalt know the origin of all the things on high,  
and all the signs in the sky, and the resplendent works of the  
glowing sun’s clear torch, and whence they arose. And thou  
shalt learn likewise of the wandering deeds of the round-faced  
moon, and of her origin. Thou shalt know, too, the heavens



that surround us, whence they arose, and how Necessity took them and bound them to keep the limits of the stars . . .

In this manner – in light of the overt poetics of becoming exhibited as the opinions of men, of mortals – we could perhaps regard Parmenides as a call from the wilderness that would ‘teach’ us to beware of a ‘deceptive ordering of words’ – but one which would have us forget Being in its significance – or, perhaps the ‘Divine’ in the sense of the *hubris* of Odysseus, as he ignored the gods in his narcissism at the end of the Trojan War. It would be, in this way, possible to set forth differing interpretations of the so-called ‘radical pluralists’. Far from an obedience to either a ‘logical’ or ‘ontological’ Parmenides, each of the pluralists – Empedocles, Anaxagoras and Democritus – sought to, as did the German Idealists in their ‘fulfillments’ of an ironic ‘system’ of Reason, set forth a way of speaking, a poetics of becoming, that would acknowledge and affirm the question of Being – the *That* of Being, of the eternal gaze of the divine that always already sees Being in an instant, as Moira, Fate and Dike. Yet, such a *poiesis* of Being held fast as the archaic question of the first – Parmenides reminds us of this originary affirmation.

It would be a great misunderstanding to picture Democritus as an academic researcher and Leucippus as a school master or mere founder of an Academy. It is clear – if we take into account the many anomalous anecdotes of the ‘tradition’ – that Democritus was a ‘wanderer’, a *traveller* amidst the vast Asiatic–Mediterranean lifeworld. It is said that he travelled to India and Ethiopia, and lived in Egypt for five years, that he wrote on Babylon, that he met Xerxes and Chaldean Magis. What are we to make of such ‘facts’? Should we merely annihilate the anomalies as the ‘source critics’ did to Herodotus? That which this ‘evidence’ does suggest is the topography of an archaic lifeworld, and of the vast prestige of Babylon, Egypt and India amid this topography. It also suggests the explicit diffusion of mythopoetic narratives and ‘philosophical’ threads throughout such a lifeworld. Democritus, in his travels, would thus be merely fulfilling the counsel of the Goddess to discover the myriad ways of mortal knowing. At the same time, Democritus exhibits the precise cogency of the indication of the context of emergence, as the mere evidence serves to not only undermine the motif of the dawn, but also cautions us against the facile repetition of anachronistic narratives, or – with the ‘recollection’ of Parmenides – to remind us of the inexorable context of tragic, mortal thought. Of course – at the end of the day – it all depends on one’s convictions, if we ‘take heed’, as with Nietzsche, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, ‘On the Prejudices of Philosophers’, to the

‘psychological’ horizons of thought, and the irrational reasons for our reasons. Lacan, with his tripartite dimensions of the imaginary, symbolic and Real, may instruct us in that the obvious symbolic *fact* suggests, for Democritus, of an imaginary that is attuned with the Real, as a disseminator and creator of tragic thought. Logic and ontology are imaginary phantasms – though ‘disguisedly’ captivated in the grips of the Real – the tragic result is ‘theoretical violence’, a paucity of the symbolic, of ‘communicative action’ (Jürgen Habermas), aesthetic (Schlegel), *ethos* (Nietzsche, Hegel, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Levinas). Democritus emerges amidst the mytho-poetic horizons of the archaic lifeworld, which intimates a possible ‘reason’ for why Plato is said to have wished to ‘burn’ all of his – Democritus’ – books. In light of his ceaseless *wanderings* and *communicative* ‘action’, we can be assured in our interpretation of Democritus in the way of the provisional criteria of the context of emergence. Not only do his own works *verify* the contributions of Burkert, and Penglase, but the extant fragments only seem to speak to us amidst the context of significance that is the archaic lifeworld – in its *mixed* existential and symbolic character. Nevertheless – it is not even necessary to consider these topographical *verifications*, but such forays facilitate a postponement, at the least, of falsification – if that is even a concern at this point . . . ‘Atoms’ are the beings of the dreamworld, as with Leibniz’ monads – the Void, Nothing, that would not be ‘theodically’ acceptable for the latter, as he remained imprisoned in Substance. Atoms – tragic beings, for, even as these orchestrate ‘leaf like’ change – they imbibe, abide, the Void – at each and every instance – amid the *topos* of fluxuation, of the music of existence with its tones and silences.

Patôcka writes in his *Plato and Europe*,<sup>2</sup>

Democritus’ thirst is a thirst for the divine – that is, the eternal, the permanent, *ἄει* (eternal) – and for this reason, Democritus says: “Who takes care of knowing, for matters of the soul, he takes care of the divine: and who takes care of other things, practical, primarily body, then he takes care solely for the human.

Whether or not – we are to accept this as an ‘authentic’ fragment of Democritus, we can ‘glean’ from this statement – from a philosopher, who was tortured to death by the Czecho-slovakian secret police in 1977 – for being a ‘phenomenologist’ – not a dualism of ‘Truths of Fact’ and of ‘Reason’, but – as with an authentic Leibniz, ‘aspiration’, amidst the mortal horizons of Being, for affirmation, for a sense of eternity, of Being – yet, within the temporal, mortal horizons of existence, in the world – expressed as a *poiesis*

of becoming, in the light of Being. We do not wish to speak ill of the dead – Patôcka, even amid his insights, embarks upon the dire path of *Pseudos* with his negative gaze – as with Jean Luc-Nancy – towards myth and mytho-poetics. For – it ‘clear’ – that poetics and *mythos* abide radically creative and critical capacities – if one ever bothered to read the poets and the thinkers amidst this *an-archic* context.

Democritus thirsts for the divine as he does not have the divine, he does not know the divine. We – as mortal – have no connection to Reality, to the gaze of the Goddess, everything we say is ‘as if’, perhaps in the manner of the Kantian taboo of the thing itself. We are always in this way of ourself – ourselves are in the way.

We are utterly forbidden the divine in light of our mortal knowing, which is that of an indication of our distention amid the tragic thread of past present and future. To the Goddess, our arbitrary chance is truly that of Fate, of necessity – to us, we still cling to our ‘constructed’ private perspectives, asleep in our capitulation to contingency. This utter disconnection from Reality discloses the *topos* of the mortal perspective, of human existence, which serves to say why Democritus left so many maxims upon the *bios* and *ethos* of mortal existence – a poetics of tragic becoming, which remains true to Being and thirsts for the graces of the Divine.

## Chapter 13

# Plato in the Shadow of the Sublime

There is an amusing story surrounding Socrates and his possible relations with Anaxagoras. It is said that Socrates was sufficiently impressed with the hearsay surrounding the book of the traveller to Athens that he paid the one drachma and read the work. Yet, Socrates was not impressed; indeed, he ridiculed the work, stating that despite the fact that much is made of the doctrine of Mind (*Nous*), that there is little 'Mind' in it. As we have intimated above, there is more to this story than a simple 'comedic' aside by the Great Master of the question. Indeed, the 'primal' aspect of the story, as a philosophical myth, begs the very question that allows us to fathom the birth – the *raison d'être* – of Platonic philosophy. As we have hinted, in our discussion of Democritus, there is a story of the development of Plato as a *sublation* of an alleged impasse between Empedocles and Anaxagoras. That story tells of the dissatisfaction of the Empedoclean response to Parmenides and his doctrine of Being. Regardless of whether or not this story is the most plausible 'account', or interpretation, of this 'situation', the gist of the narrative suggests that Anaxagoras sought to address the issue of the utter 'specificity' of this be-ing of singular morphologies amidst the *topos* of temporal becoming. In this light, we could fathom the relevance of Socrates' ridicule if we recall the schema of 'seeds' which were meant – for Anaxagoras – to underwrite the 'specificity' of existence. Socrates would then be simply contending that such a 'notion' would not be necessary, if much more was made of the doctrine of the Mind. As we can readily gather from a reading of this account of the birth and development of Platonic philosophy, it would be precisely such a notion of 'seeds' that would be conveniently displaced by the Doctrine of Ideas and Forms. While such a tale, myth, may, at the end of the day, cast light upon the context of emergence of Platonic philosophy, there is more to the story – and other ways of 'seeing' the story. We have already interrupted the story with our considerations of Democritus – that, not only did tragic thought proceed without the doctrine of the *Nous* (in the 'form' suggested by Socrates), but that

Democritus, who admired Anaxagoras, radicalized the latter with his assertion of 'Atoms' and the 'Void'. But, not in the direction of Mind (*Nous*) in the sense of conceptual and schematic 'forms' or 'types' – but, in a deadly attunement with Tragic thought, as an affirmation of the power of Chance. This may seem to be a rather trivial 'fact' to one who regards 'chance' as that which is merely 'arbitrary', 'contingent', 'accidental', 'chaotic' – but, such designations beg so many questions that we are left dumbfounded as to where to begin. Yet, such 'designations' already exist amidst the cob webs of the theoretical man – have meaning in the post-Renaissance re-activation of Plato and that which he is meant to signify – or – merely within the horizons of 'Platonism' as such. Or – in other words, such designations, such a vision of Chance, is utterly anachronistic, and, thus, simply misses the significance of this gesture of deference toward the Divine. That which is lost on the interpreters of the so-called 'radical pluralists' is the possibility that they are not, at the end of the day, opposed to Parmenides, but are in effect seeking to fulfil the injunction of Parmenides to remain true not only to the question of Being (the Divine), but also, to pursue the tragic, these ways of mortal knowing using the grammars of time and existence that have emerged amidst the contexts of significance for a 'historical' lifeworld. Perhaps, it is the case that the 'seeds' of Anaxagoras are meant only as 'divine comedy', as a *reduction ad absurdum* with the punchline being quite obvious – that we simply do not know, that *Moira* hovers over all of our endeavours to become [God]. Of course, this is only another story . . . Yet, even if he were serious – or, was merely speaking 'symbolically' – it is clear that there are good grounds to question the hegemonic paradigm, which 'instructs' us as to the 'definition' of the 'pre-socratics'. Patôcka, as we have intimated earlier, sets forth an uncommon portrayal of Democritus with a 'fragment' which suggests two orders of discourse, of the 'soul' and that of the 'body' – and, of the language appropriate to each. Such a gesture, if we resist the temptations toward our own 'modernist' horizons, clearly intimates an 'affinity' with Parmenides, Empedocles, Leucippus, and Anaxagoras – and, with the *context of emergence* of early 'Greek' – Tragic – thought. That which a Goddess knows is not accessible to mortals, apart from the uncanny gift of disclosure – we are Oedipus, who seeks to flee in the face of destiny, fate, chance – but, to no avail as the 'Truth is already the Truth'. It simply does not look that way to us – we wish we can still escape from *this* – but, it can never look this way to us – as mortals . . . unless? . . . Never . . . We 'affirm' – but, with *empty hands* (Rudolf Bultmann). Or – is this just another 'repetition' of Platonic 'denial' – of the anachronism of nihilism in the wake of the radical absence of [God]?

Should we amplify this anachronism with an astutely uttered 'Theology of the Event', of the absence of [God], as the best *via negativa* 'proof' of the 'existence' of God – as, we *clearly* do not stop 'speaking' of *Him* – even though this is a 'sin' – but, who cares about the *principle of contradiction*, or these alleged diatribes of Socrates against the Sophists, these peddlers of wishful thinking?

Of course, beyond this Plato of mere suppression, of that one, who expelled the poets from his Ideal Polis, there is another 'Plato', and one who comes in aid whenever the 'topic' of conversation, strangely, 'turns' to Nietzsche's devastating attack on 'Plato' – as the destroyer of 'perspective', of life with his assertion of the Pure Idea of the Good. Indeed, this is the 'Plato' of Hölderlin, and the 'early German Romantics' – before they learned the 'Strife' of the 'world' (not to mention so as to note the British romantics, Keats, Coleridge and Shelley, who hymn an intellectual beauty that is tarnished with disease, violence, death – 'evil'). Nietzsche, as we have seen, diagnoses the death of tragedy as due to the displacement of the Dionysian, of the Chorus, from Tragedy, under the influence of Socrates. This leads us immediately to not only the denial of perspective, life, as mentioned, but also to the claim that Christianity is 'Platonism for the people', and is itself a 'mytho-ideology' of nihilism, one which expresses its own will-to-power – in the suppression of the body, the erotic and 'common sense' (Thomas Paine). I have heard another story that there is a different *Plato* – from those who wish to either to deny Nietzsche his spoils, or from those, who have seen *something else besides*. This is the 'Plato' of an aesthetics of Beauty – of the *Phraedrus*, *Symposium* – in other words – not the '*Republic*'. We have readily ascertained the marked differences between Plato and his 'predecessors', it is still possible to ascertain not only the 'family resemblances' of his philosophy with the others, but also to apprehend his dependence upon the earlier (and with Nietzsche, perhaps superior) attempts to articulate a 'philosophy of existence'. It is, moreover, important to emphasize that which is readily obvious, but perhaps so obvious that we do not notice it: the use by Plato of myth and poetry – not to mention his 'youthful ambition' to become a 'tragic poet'. It is in the form of a dialogue that Plato articulates the *topos* for his own philosophical questioning, and his many references to gods, goddesses and other myths – not to mention the basic structures of his philosophy – can trace their genealogy to our original *context of emergence*. This as an aesthetics of Beauty stands in the face of that radical denial of perspective, this 'condition of possibility' for the apprehension of the 'beautiful'. Is this a tale of two Plato's . . . one, working for the other, as it were (and seems)? For, although we have good grounds to

question 'Plato', in his *Republic* . . . it is said that this questioning must come to an end with the Plato of Beauty. Of course – and despite the entire *via negativa* strategies of apophatic 'discourse' – there is *this* – Beauty – which is alleged to serve as proof that Nietzsche is 'wrong' – not only, about 'Plato', but also, about its variations for the people, 'Christianity', 'Islam', etc. To reiterate: Nietzsche is wrong about Plato since he commented only upon the *Republic*. Yet, it is not 'clear' – if this is *the case*, or even if it *makes any sense*. For, his criticisms extend to 'Beauty' – it is obvious that Nietzsche was acquainted with the 'system' of Schopenhauer – who himself invoked these Platonic Ideals in his 'aesthetical phenomenology'<sup>1</sup> – his 'noumenology'. Yet, let us 'look' more closely at the text, to the distinction between the *beautiful* and the *sublime*. Beauty – which is the watchword for aesthetic Platonists (and their parasites), and for some Romantics who eventually gave up their 'illusions' – has no 'ultimate' significance – it does not disclose the 'truth of being' – it is merely a suppression, nihilism in disguise.

Schopenhauer testifies that the experience of Beauty is a loss of self, a redemption, as with Nietzsche's notion of the Apollonian, the god of beauty, of the dream image, Maya. Yet, Beauty is merely a distraction, ultimately – even though it becomes an archetype of 'principle' – as it is 'incestuous' with the denial of the 'Will'. Yet, what of the Sublime, this radical *topos* of and expression of a 'hermeneutics of existence'? Schopenhauer – as even with this version of 'Plato' – even amid 'Beauty' – seeks to deny the Sublime – the terrible truth, the horror and the threatening – this is merely another 'escape'. Nietzsche, on the contrary, radically exalts the tragic *topos* of the Sublime, as an 'event' and place of affirmation, self-interpretation, and self-expression. If we could only say that Beauty itself is another suppression of the Dionysian . . . Yet, we 'howl' amid this explosive astonishment. We forget ourselves in the *beautiful*, but the Event of the *sublime* threatens us and opens a *topos* of self-interpretation. This insight – thought – takes us away from a 'routine' narrative of Beauty – tainted though it is – yet, never opening up toward utter nothingness, death, horror, comedy of the 'terrible truth'. With this 'denial', we can 'see' that Nietzsche is less in errancy than the 'Romantics' – in his intimation of the Dionysian *topos* of self interpretation, of a 'hermeneutics of the self', 'expression', amid this *topos* of being.

Nietzsche counsels us not to deny the 'Will' – the Dionysian – for the sake of Platonic ideas – since, it is clear that one of the ideas explodes all ideas – the sublime – the Dionysian – this is the *topos* of our existence and this is why Nietzsche pursued a path of his own. Nevertheless, these are only indications for us, intimations – of Plato and his shadow – or, in other words, of the polysemy of Plato himself, of an inherent ambiguity across the

topography of his 'textual' expression, one that – as we have suggested – has served the ideologists of Christianity with a strategy of denial of the charge of nihilism (Nietzsche's gift to Christianity). However, as we have detected, beauty as *eidos* is not a sufficient criteria to extricate one from the charge for the charge does not concern aesthetic experience and the claim that such experience is being denied – on the contrary, that which is being denied is *tragic* existence articulated as a poetics of an innocent becoming, and intimate hermeneutics of mortal existence. In this light, Nietzsche's charge against Socrates and Euripides holds, for beauty remains an indication of the Apollonian, and its mere recognition is not sufficient to overcome the catastrophe of the radical elimination of the Dionysian – of the tragic. Moreover, such beauty will be tainted by this loss and will fail – as with the failure of the imagination in romanticism, itself an echo of Kant's own 'eulogy' in his analysis of the sublime in the *Critique of Judgement*. Kant's strategy of 'positing' Reason as the triumphant hero in the face of the threatening is in turn called into question by the mere evanescence of the Dionysian, in that it cannot – as tragic thought – seek to conquer, escape or overcome the ultimate double bind of the sublime – but to exalt in the utter destruction of the mortal individual amidst the eternal recurrence of the same. It is in the impossible encounter with the sublime – with mortality – that the *topos* of radical hermeneutics emerges as the 'site' of the disclosure of the terrible truth of existence, regardless of the possibility of beauty. We could furthermore suggest – with Nietzsche – that such beauty is merely illusion – naturalized as 'Mind' – outside of the context of tragic thought – in severance from the Dionysian. In this light, Socrates' ridicule of Anaxagoras flies back into his own face as the *eidetic* resolution of Plato is no solution at all, but simply a dissolution of the intellectual horizons of tragic poetry and thought. Beauty, Truth – and the Good, made pure – this is the denial of perspective, life, which is the topological situation of Dionysian thought – or, perhaps, as Heidegger suggests in his seminal text *Being and Time*:

We are asking about the ontological meaning of the dying of the person who dies, as a possibility of being which belongs to his being.<sup>2</sup>



## Epilogue: Poetics and the *Matheme* – On Badiou's Lacan

The births of Odysseus and Apollo were delayed as Hera kept *Eilythea* – the goddess of childbirth in Homer's *Iliad*, distracted . . . perhaps. She is also responsible for a delay in our attempt to grasp, to bring into light an understanding of early Greek thought, the tragic thought – amid many masks – of the god-philosopher Dionysus, the son of one of her mortal rivals, Semele – for whose death she is also responsible. As the myth tells, Hera appeared to Semele, tempting her to ask her lover Zeus to reveal himself in his true form. Zeus, reluctantly, consents to the request of his innocent lover – and destroys her as he illuminates himself as the lightning bolt. Such a story echoes our own meditations upon tragic existence and the Dionysian Fate of the one who is born of woman. Dionysus himself is not 'born of woman', but abides the trace of his mother with his recurrent death. The god of tragic dissolution – intoxication, dithyrambic *poiesis* and music – finds the roots of his own recurrent rebirth in that he is not only the son of Zeus, but also in that, with the death of Semele, Zeus sews Dionysus into his leg, until the event of his *monstrous* 'birth'. The monstrous site of tragedy – the terrible truth – is ironically the site of affirmation of mortality – the site of a radical tension of the mortal 'spirit' – and the overdetermined tensions of strategems which seek to overcome, to escape the 'mortal coil' of existence. We speak again of Plato – and of his progeny – and of the tradition of the *theorein* of philosophy and of its attempts to extirpate the radical uncertainty and ambiguity of mortal existence. In our current era, we exist in a nearly unthinking acquiescence to the 'traditional', canonical – 'instruction' as the significance of tragic thought, and to the extent that we do not, any longer, seek to comprehend the radical significance of tragic thought and of its context of emergence in the archaic world. Such an oblivion is ubiquitous across 'traditions' of Western thought – traversing not only its history, but also in light of the descendents of theoretical man in the Analytic and Continental discourses upon early Greek thought. In this way, I will 'turn' to one of the recent commentators upon early Greek thought to make myself clear.

Badiou, in his ‘Lacan and the Presocratics’, brings his omnivorous attentions to Lacan in his scattered indications of the ‘pre-socratics’ in light of his own attempts to ‘dis-articulate’ – under the sign of ‘anti-philosophy’ – a genealogy of ‘psycho-analysis’ over against Plato’s own utter forgetfulness of difference. While the purpose of the current meditation exceeds Lacan and his pre-occupations with Freudian thought, I would like to specify two prejudices that are noted by Lacan – and amplified by Badiou – regarding, not only the *grandiose* significance of the ‘pre-socratics’, but also their *innocent* method of *praxis*. On the one hand, Lacan contests, in the words of Badiou, that:

The grandiose aspect lies in the conviction that the question of the Real is commensurable with that of language; the innocence is in not having carried this conviction as far as its true principle, which is mathematization. You will recall that Lacan holds mathematization to be the key to any thinkable relation to the Real. He never varied on this point. In the seminar *Encore*, he says, without the slightest note of caution: ‘Mathematization alone reaches a real.’ Without mathematization, without the grasp of the letter (*la prise de la lettre*), the Real remains captive to a mundane reality driven by a phantasm.

On the other hand, in their utter innocence, the ‘pre-socratics’ wallowed in *poiesis* as the next best thing,

This is why their writings prefigure mathematization, although the latter is not present in its literal form. The premonition appears in its paradoxical inversion, the use of poetic form. Far from opposing, as Heidegger did, the Pre-Socratic poem to Plato’s *matheme*, Lacan has the powerful idea that poetry was the closest thing to mathematization available to the Pre-Socratics. Poetic form is the innocence of the grandiose. For Lacan, it even goes beyond the explicit content of statements, because it anticipates the regularity of the *matheme*. In *Encore*, he writes:

Fortunately, Parmenides actually wrote poems. Doesn’t he use linguistic devices – the linguist’s testimony takes precedence here – that closely resemble mathematical articulation, alternation after succession, framing after alternation? It is precisely because he was a poet that Parmenides says what he has to say to us in the least stupid of manners. Otherwise, the idea that being is and that nonbeing is not, I don’t know what that means to you, but personally I find that stupid.

The basic proposition – expressed by Badiou – that underwrites these many question-begging assertions is that the ‘Pre-Socratics had the grandiose audacity to break with all traditional forms of knowledge’. While it is ‘clear’ that Lacan – as with Badiou – has myriad ‘sympathies’ with the ‘pre-socratics’ – and finds hints and intimations in their fragments of many of his own notions, such as the topographical dispersion of difference, and the death-drive (for Dionysus is Hades), it is also clear that – despite his own obsessions with ‘identity’, of the ‘perfection’ of the ‘divided soul’ – it is only with Plato that ‘thought’ achieves ‘mathematization’ – and thus, an explicit connection to the Real (which may serve as an explanation for the mathematical form of the thought in Badiou, and his student, Quentin Meillassoux). To reiterate – the ‘pre-socratics’ broke with all existing forms of thought, a break – as a trauma – which prefigured at least one other breaks in this tradition, of Parmenides, who achieved, though innocently, the ‘standpoint’ of philosophy. In this line of argument – and despite the clear recognition of Heidegger’s radical juxtaposition of *poesis* with *matheme* – it is simply stated by Badiou, ‘Lacan has the powerful idea that poetry was the closest thing to mathematization available to the Pre-Socratics.’ That which this assertion discloses – and this is despite the pseudo-acknowledgement of Heidegger and his indication of *Aletheia* (which is addressed in the narrative context of a psychoanalytic discussion of repression) – is a failure, refusal or perhaps a *repression*, all its own – of that to which Heidegger is pointing, guiding us. In other words, there is no serious attempt to grasp Heidegger’s juxtaposition poetry and logic in a manner which would allow for a contestation of the assertion of the utter stupidity of poetry – its inferiority to Platonic *matheme*. Neither is there any allusion to the thoughts of Nietzsche on the ‘pre-platonic’ philosophers and of his intimation of a *gay science* seen through the ‘lens of art’.

At the end of the day – and attempting to take a step back so that we can disclose that which is truly at stake in this refusal – the interpretation of Lacan, which Badiou endorses, is merely another – and regardless of possible proto-allusions to the science of psycho-analysis by Parmenides, Empedocles, Heraclitus, variations of a ‘motif of the dawn’ – layered with an unacknowledged web of anachronisms gleaned from the ‘Canon’, from the ‘Master’ narrative, which speaks in the ‘Name of the Father’. Neither Nietzsche, nor Heidegger are brought into the conversation so as to disrupt the repetition of the motif of the dawn, the myth of Western philosophy and science – the ‘mythology’ of the *matheme*. In such a context, as with the

twentieth century ‘logical positivists’, and their progeny in the Analytic *and* Continental traditions, it is clear that we must only be interested in these early thinkers, in reference to our own concerns – such a narrative simply dismisses, with its overtly anachronistic strategies, any necessity for an attempt to retrieve an indigenous understanding of early ‘Greek’ thought – on its own terms and in its own context. Badiou admits, innocently, that this is the case when he contends that ‘psycho-analysis’, despite its heavy borrowings from Tragic Poetry, is only possible in the era of ‘modernity’. But – we must ask – why is Lacan’s contention that ‘poetics’ is the best that the ‘pre-socratics’ could muster so ‘powerful’? What if Lacan is in ‘errancy’, what if with his very perspective, he is unable to comprehend early ‘Greek’ thought? If he merely gives us another variation of the Same, a repetition of the ‘identity’ of the ‘pre-socratics’, it would be likely that his scattered comments would not only be *useless* for an understanding of early ‘Greek’, tragic thought, but also, detrimental to any comprehension of the significance of archaic thought for an understanding of the predicament of mortals – and – of their ‘psychology’, the *logos* of their *psyche* – an old word, to say the least. Badiou warns us at the beginning of his essay that any philosophical discussion of Lacan is hazardous, and difficult. Yet, that which would seem to be the most hazardous of all is an uncritical repetition of an unacknowledged mythology that has serious *philosophical* implications – such as noted in Heidegger’s juxtaposition of *poiesis* and *matheme*. Perhaps, we could suggest – in our cynicism (Diogenes) – that Badiou ‘gives a pass’ to Lacan since he is already in agreement with the trajectory of a myth which *mystically* gives to the *technè* of mathematization a ‘grandiose’ access to the Real. The primal questions have already been decided, and the essay on ‘Lacan and the Pre-Socratics’ is only a ‘post-text’ for an ‘unconscious’ repetition of the myth, *of the motif* – as the ‘psycho-analytic image’ which ferments *under* its narrative of a transcendence of myth (Wittgenstein, Bataille).

Let us be clear – ‘Reality’ (or, as that which is defined by the Platonic *matheme*) is not the question – ‘problem’, if it has a notion of ‘problems’ – of tragic thought – unless, ‘Reality’ is meant to indicate, the *terrible truth* of Dionysian existence, as we have already anticipated at the close of Chapter 12. Amidst the ultimate double-bind of ‘tragic differing’, ‘Reality’, in the sense of that which is distilled through the Platonic *matheme*, is merely an attempt to ‘nullify’ the radical flux of temporal – mortal – existence with a retreat into the ethereal typologies of a ‘truth’ which has repressed its obvious fallibility, its radical ‘unknowing’. ‘Reality’ cuts across the Gordian Knot of tragedy, setting free mortals to find another

illusion. But, an illusion it is – a dream image – though one divorced from the primordial ‘music’ of Life. In other words, if ‘Reality’ is read as the myth of Platonic *matheme* – a reading which Lacan (and Badiou) seems to intend – then much is lost, repressed, and indeed, squandered. Not only do we *lose* the vast insights of Heidegger, with respect to the primordial character of *poiesis* – as a *logos* of tragic mortal existence, but, we also ‘lose’ Nietzsche’s genealogy of tragic poetry and thought, as the tracing of the ‘bitter fruit’, the *mixed* progeny, of mytho-poetic *differance*. Indeed, what must be lost through such a reading is any attempt to apprehend the tragic horizons of early ‘Greek’ thought as we become lost in the labyrinths of over-lapping anachronisms – and, to the extent, that any interest in archaic thought is reduced merely to the ‘paradigms’ of ‘modern questions’, such as that of ‘psycho-analysis’ (not to mention the humiliating prostitution of philosophy to ‘science’ and ‘religion’ – nor, *that* excess of pseudo-philosophical ‘uses’ of philosophy *as such*).

Enough – that which the current study has disclosed is a meta-narrative of ‘beginnings’, which exposes the lack of ‘beginning’ – of the ‘origin’ – the pure ‘essence’ of ‘that which is the case’. Not only did the tragic thinkers not ‘break’ with ‘all traditional forms of knowledge’ – indeed, they can only be fathomed in light of this context of emergence, as a meta-narrative of *mixed* types. It is through a radical hermeneutics, of *poiesis* (if not mere ‘poetry’ of our sense) – that the *terrible truth* of Tragic existence, is expressed – that the laughter of Dionysus is heard – amidst our mortal topography – our tragic life – of *metontological* perspectives.

Shattered  
by *that*  
Phantasms  
*this* silent *showing*,  
*revealing*  
abides  
*our* place  
where we can hear  
the peal of laughter  
in the wake of  
our primal secret . . .  
The peal of laughter,  
that sublime, *unexpected* response  
entangles this tightening rope of

horror and nihilism,  
reminds us of the *chaos, open space*  
that surrounds us at every moment . . .  
Laughter is one affirmation of be-ing  
'within' ever enclosing horizons.  
If we listen near enough,  
We can hear that it is  
We – ourselves –  
who are laughing.

# Notes

## Prologue: Before the Dawn

- <sup>1</sup> Badiou, Alain (2006) 'Lacan and the Pre-Socratics', in *lacan.com*.
- <sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1989) *Twilight of the Idols*, New York and London: Penguin.
- <sup>3</sup> Foti, Veronique (2006) *Epochal Discordance: Hölderlin's Philosophy of Tragedy*, Albany: SUNY.

## Chapter 1

- <sup>1</sup> Derrida, Jacques (1982) 'Différance', *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- <sup>2</sup> Frank, Manfred (2004) *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. by Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, Albany: SUNY Press.
- <sup>3</sup> So far, we have begun to explore various aspects of the *context of emergence* of early Greek philosophy. But, again, why Greek philosophy? Iraq, Babylonia, Egypt, etc. were the real cradles of civilization. In addition to Burkert and Penglase, Martin Bernal, for instance, in his *Black Athena*, traces significant Greek ideas back to Asia and Africa. The exclusive on 'Greece' is, thus, for Bernal, *racist*, and indeed, such exclusivity was used as propaganda for Aryan supremacy since the beginning of the nineteenth century. These questions should be considered by the student of ancient philosophy.
- <sup>4</sup> Derrida, J. (1992) 'Force of Law: 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority'', *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. by Drucilla Cornell and Michael Rosenfeld, New York: Routledge.
- <sup>5</sup> Hölderlin, F. (1988) 'On the Law of Freedom', *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. by Thomas Pfau, Albany: SUNY, pp. 33–34.
- <sup>6</sup> Bataille, G. (1991) *Accursed Share*, Vol. I, trans. by Robert Hurley, New York: Zone Books.
- <sup>7</sup> The possibility of this *redaction*, following Miranda, is discussed in Luchte, J. (2009) 'Zarathustra and the Children of Abraham,' *Plü*, Vol. 20, pp. 195–225, and *The Agonist*, Vol. 2, Number 2.
- <sup>8</sup> Aristotle (like and unlike Goethe) lays out his phenomenology of plant growth as an investigation of the causes or conditions necessary for there to be such a phenomenon, and the *phronesis* of these causes will constitute knowledge in the ideational schema of aetiology. (First, for there to be growth, there must be the stuff or material of growth, the material presence of the acorn, the soil in which it grows, and water. These material conditions for the growth of the oak tree are designated as the *material cause*. Second, there must also be the shape or *morphe*

of the process of growth, the shaped of the acorn, the features of its germination, such as roots, leaves, and eventually stems, branches. Such morphological features are designated by Aristotle as the *formal cause*. Third, in addition to these first two causes, or the matter and form, there must also be the motive force or the *energia* of the metamorphosis of the acorn into the oak tree. Such a motive force, a feature of all early Greek philosophy, was designated by Aristotle as the *efficient cause*. And, finally, in addition to all of these causes, or conditions of possibility for the growth of the acorn into the oak tree, there is also the necessity of a destination or *telos* for the process of growth. This destination or *telos* for the process was designated by Aristotle as the *Final Cause*, and in this case, it is the oak tree itself in its mature state). In this manner, Aristotle demonstrates that the flux of existence or the transitory state of becoming can be made intelligible to mortal thinking.

- <sup>9</sup> This question is influenced by the notion of ‘epochal discordance (Foti, 2006), who, in her reading of Schürmann, intimated that ‘tragedy’ or the ‘tragic’ is not a ‘period of time’, an ‘age’ but is the persistent scintillation of temporal singularization, that is, of the human condition (Arendt, 1978). In this way, it would be possible to retrieve the tragic in Plato and Aristotle – and, perhaps, their own strategies of evading the terrible truth of the Dionysian.
- <sup>10</sup> Vasari, Giorgio (2008) *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. by J. and P. Bondanella, Oxford University Press.
- <sup>11</sup> Patocka, J. (2002) *Plato and Europe*, Stanford.
- <sup>12</sup> Feyerabend, Paul (1975) *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchist theory of Knowledge*, Humanities Press.
- <sup>13</sup> Arendt, Hannah (1978) *Life of the Mind*, ed. Mary McCarthy, 2 vols, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

## Chapter 2

- <sup>1</sup> Gadamer, H.G. (1989) *Truth and Method*, trans. by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall, New York: Crossroad.
- <sup>2</sup> Caputo, J. (1988) *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- <sup>3</sup> Bernal, M. (1987) *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Rutgers University Press.
- <sup>4</sup> Lord Byron (1970) ‘The Curse of Minerva’, *Byron: Poetical Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 142–145.
- <sup>5</sup> Lord Byron (1970) ‘Canto XV: ‘Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage’’, *Byron: Poetical Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 179–251.
- <sup>6</sup> Warren, James (2010) *Presocratics*, Stocksfield: Acumen. His docility to the canon is furthermore indicated in his (2007) *Presocratics: Natural Philosophers before Socrates*, University of California Press.
- <sup>7</sup> Khomeini, Imam (1981) ‘Lectures on Surat al-Fatiha’, *Islam and Revolution*, trans. by Hamid Algar, Berkeley: Mizan Press, pp. 365–425.
- <sup>8</sup> It may seem that May 68, etc., and Heidegger (guilt by a Derrida text, ‘Heidegger and the Question of Spirit’) and bureaucratic ‘modernism and post-modernism’ has displaced any incentive to think about (though Krell stands ‘strong in the storm’) tragic thought (not to even mention the entire Medieval Age to which it



is an answer [and may be replaced by the better managers in the Radical Orthodox camp]) for many Modern European philosophers. Yet, the irony is, and has been, that only with an intimation of the *meaning* of the tragic, can we ever begin to understand May 68, etc. We live the comedy, the farce . . .

- <sup>9</sup> Luchte, James (2006) 'The Pelasgian Creation Myth', *Gnosis*, Franklin Lakes: New Page.
- <sup>10</sup> Graves, Robert (1955) *The Greek Myths*, Vol. 1, New York: Penguin.
- <sup>11</sup> Orphica, Theogonies, Fragment 54 (from Damascius) (trans. West) (Greek hymns C3rd–C2nd B.C.)
- <sup>12</sup> Homer (1992) *The Odyssey*, trans. by Robert Fitzgerald, London: Random House.
- <sup>13</sup> Mauss, M. (2000) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by A.D. Hall, London: W. W. Norton.
- <sup>14</sup> Hoff, Johannes (2007) Kontingenz, Berührung, Überschreitung. Zur philosophischen Propädeutik christlicher Mystik nach Nikolaus von Kues (Contingency, Tangency, Transgression: A Philosophical Propaedeutics of Christian Mysticism subsequent to Nicholas of Cusa), Alber: Freiburg/Br.
- <sup>15</sup> Indeed, for Nietzsche, there is no conflict between authentic philosophical thought and his 'work' as the subterranean man, between thought and the activity which excavates the often ugly, horrible and crooked genealogies cast across the scattered *topos* of existence. Authentic thought, for Nietzsche, finds its *lifeworld* amidst those 'systems and breaks', diffusions, influences, and exclusions of the effervescence of existence. Yet, such 'ontic' genealogies would never be the concern of Heidegger, who, in light of his statements upon 'philosophical anthropology', would have regarded such inquiries as *anthropological*, or, even 'scientific'.
- <sup>16</sup> Archilochus (1992) *Early Greek Lyric Poetry*, trans. by David Mulroy, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 25.
- <sup>17</sup> Baudelaire, Charles (1998) *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan, Oxford University Press.
- <sup>18</sup> Sappho (1992) *Early Greek Lyric Poetry*, trans. by David Mulroy, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 95–96.
- <sup>19</sup> Nisetich, Frank (1980) *Pindar's Victory Odes*, trans. by Frank Nisetich, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, pp. 169–173.

## Chapter 3

- <sup>1</sup> Edler, Frank. 'Alfred Baeumler on Hölderlin and the Greeks: Reflections on the Heidegger-Baeumler Relationship', *Janus Head*.
- <sup>2</sup> Heidegger, M. (1998) *Parmenides*, trans. by Andre Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, Indiana University Press, p. 122. Heidegger states:

For the Greeks the divine is based immediately on the uncanny in the ordinary. It comes to light in the distinction of the one from the other. Nowhere do we find here a display of unusual beings, by means of which the divine would first have to be awakened and a sense for it first aroused. Therefore also the question of the so-called 'Dionysian' must be unfolded first as a Greek question. For many reasons we may doubt whether the Nietzschean interpretation of the

- Dionysian can justly be maintained, or whether it is not a coarse interpreting back of an uncritical nineteenth century 'biologism' into the Greek world.
- <sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, F. (2010) 'Through the Circle of Dionysos Dithyrambs', No. 103, *The Peacock and the Buffalo: The Poetry of Nietzsche*, trans. by James Luchte, London and New York: Continuum.
  - <sup>4</sup> von Schlegel, Friedrich (1968) 'Selected Ideas: Idea 127', trans. by Ernst Behler and Roman Struc, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, Pennsylvania University Press.
  - <sup>5</sup> Buckham, P. W. (1827) *Theatre of the Greeks*, Cambridge: W.P. Grant. Cicero writes: 'Veniat Aeschylus, non poeta solum, sed etiam Pythagoreus; sic enim accepimus', which is translated as 'Let us see what Aeschylus says, who was not only a poet but a Pythagorean philosopher also, for that is the account which you have received of him . . . ' (Book II.10.)
  - <sup>6</sup> For instance, whether it requires the 'purification of the soul' or points to an attempt to achieve an *attunement* with the divine, or the All, whether it be regarded as 'nothingness' (Buddhism), an incorporeal, transcendent 'God' (Plato and 'Christian' heresies of reincarnation) – or, as with the early Greeks, the divine as the All, or the *Kosmos*.

## Chapter 4

- <sup>1</sup> Heidegger, M. (1977) 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead"', *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt, New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- <sup>2</sup> Heidegger, M. (1963) *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. by Fred Wieck, New York: Harper Perennial.
- <sup>3</sup> Luchte, J. (2008) 'The Wreckage of Stars: Nietzsche and the Ecstasy of Poetry', *Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics*, New York: Nietzsche Circle Journal.
- <sup>4</sup> Heidegger, M. (1977) 'The Turning', *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt, New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- <sup>5</sup> Krell, D. F. (2005) *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing of God*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- <sup>6</sup> For an alternative account of Heidegger's interaction with the Nazis, see Frank Edler, 'Philosophy, Language, and Politics: Heidegger's Attempt to Steal the Language of the Revolution in 1933–34', *Social Research*, 57.1. (Spring 1990): 197–238. See also Safranski, Rüdiger (1999) *Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. by Ewald Osers, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, in which he details the specific charges by the Nazis against Heidegger.

## Chapter 5

- <sup>1</sup> Castree, N. and Gregory, D. (2006) *David Harvey: a Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- <sup>2</sup> Heidegger, Martin (1971) 'A dialogue on language (between a Japanese and an inquirer)', *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz, 1–54, New York: Harper & Row.

- <sup>3</sup> Derrida, J. (1991) *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- <sup>4</sup> Derrida, J. (1996) *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Mills, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- <sup>5</sup> Dallmayr, F. (1993) *The Other Heidegger*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- <sup>6</sup> Foucault, M. (1984) 'What is Enlightenment?', *The Foucault Reader*, trans. by Paul Rabinow, New York: Vintage.
- <sup>7</sup> Foucault, M. (1988) *Madness and Civilization*, trans. by Paul Rabinow, New York: Vintage.
- <sup>8</sup> Foucault, M. (1995) *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by Paul Rabinow, New York: Vintage.
- <sup>9</sup> Foucault, M. (1984) 'Nietzsche Genealogy History?', *The Foucault Reader*, trans. by Paul Rabinow, New York: Vintage.
- <sup>10</sup> Krell, D. F. (2009) *The Death of Empedocles: A Mourning Play*, Albany: SUNY.
- <sup>11</sup> Freeman, Judy (1993) *Mark Tansy*, 'Robbe-Grillet Cleansing Every Object in Sight' [1981], San Francisco: Chronicle Books, p. 38.
- <sup>12</sup> Bataille, G. (1992) *Theory of Religion*, trans. by Robert Hurley, New York: Zone Books.
- <sup>13</sup> Bataille, G. (1991) *Accursed Share*, Vol. 1, trans. by Robert Hurley, New York: Zone Books.
- <sup>14</sup> Bataille, G. (1985) 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', *Visions of Excess*, University of Minnesota Press.

## Chapter 6

- <sup>1</sup> Milbank, John, and Simon Oliver (eds) (2009) *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, London: Routledge.
- <sup>2</sup> Cf., for instance, Bryant, Levi, Graham Harman and Nick Srnicek (2010) *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, Melbourne: Re.Press.

## Chapter 7

- <sup>1</sup> Contrary to these claims, as well of Derrida, Heidegger is not unaware of sexual difference even in the early period as he mentions the latter in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, though in this early period, he would have answered that *Dasein* is neither a 'boy or a girl' but is metaphysically neutral, as the ground of Being. The possibilities open up with the 'turn' and with his prioritization of the Goddess of Truth as *Aletheia*.

## Chapter 9

- <sup>1</sup> Buckham, 1827. Cicero writes: '*Veniat Aeschylus, non poeta solum, sed etiam Pythagoreus; sic enim accepimus*', which is translated as 'Let us see what Aeschylus says, who was not only a poet but a Pythagorean philosopher also, for that is the account which you have received of him' (Book II.10.).

- <sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (1967) *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, London: Penguin. p. 78–79. The reference to Pythagoras as a philosopher of tragedy not only will transfigure our conception of his and his follower's patronage of Apollo, but will also cast Nietzsche's 1886 'Attempt at Self-Criticism' into an entirely new light as to its attempt to explore the relationship between art and science in light of the affirmation of a tragic pessimism. For more on Nietzsche and Pythagoras, see James Porter (2005) 'Nietzsche and Tragedy', *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. by Rebecca Bushnell, London: Blackwell.
- <sup>3</sup> Hawkings, Stephen (2010) *The Grand Design*, Bantam Press.

## Chapter 10

- <sup>1</sup> Dolin, E. F. (1962) 'Parmenides and Hesiod', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*.
- <sup>2</sup> Burnet, John (1892) *Early Greek Philosophy*, London: A & C Black Ltd.
- <sup>3</sup> Heidegger, M. and Fink, E. (1993) *Heracitus Seminar*, trans. by Charles H. Seibert, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, p. 17.
- <sup>4</sup> Schürmann, Reiner (1989) 'Tragic Differing: The Law of the One and the Law of Contraries in Parmenides', *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 13:1, 3–20.

## Chapter 12

- <sup>1</sup> In this light, it would be important to yet again resist the anachronism that might suggest that the philosophy of Democritus is the same as or a forerunner of contemporary atomism – although it would also be significant to bring these forms of atomism into dialogue. But, the mytho-poetic, and, indeed, sacred significance of the philosophy of Democritus must not be forgotten, especially in respect of the tragic significance of death in this philosophy and of the unfathomable meaning of chance.
- <sup>2</sup> Patôcka (2002) *Plato and Europe*, Stanford, p. 68.

## Chapter 13

- <sup>1</sup> Luchte, J. (2009) 'The Body of Sublime Knowledge: The Aesthetic Phenomenology of Arthur Schopenhauer,' *Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 50, Number 2, pp. 228–242.
- <sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, *Being and Time*, p. 283. For an in depth study of Heidegger's radical phenomenology, please see Luchte, J. (2008) *Heidegger's Early Philosophy: The Phenomenology of Ecstatic Temporality*, London and New York: Continuum

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